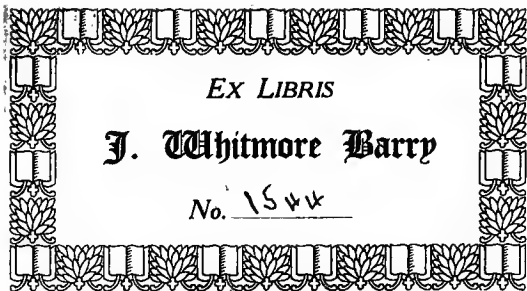


THE HOUSE OF SIN



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THE HOUSE OF SIN

THE
HOUSE OF SIN

BY
MARCELLE TINAYRE

TRANSLATED BY A. SMYTH

LONDON
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THE HOUSE OF SIN

I

WHITE curtains, hanging over the deep embrasure of the window, shut out the aspect of the misty, waning day. They enclosed, as in a dimly luminous chapel, a child, reading and dreaming.

The drawing-room, adorned with wainscoting and wooden beams, and furnished with old mahogany, seemed vast and cold at this twilight hour. The symmetrical frames of the portraits, catching a gleam of daylight, revealed here and there the outline of glittering foliage, or the veining of an acanthus. But the shadows, already deep in the angles of the walls, gained ground insensibly. The fading light withdrew further and further, and, momentarily withheld by the muslins of the window, lingered an instant in their woof before finally disappearing.

Of the child, leaning over his book, one could only distinguish his black garments, relieved by the wan line of the neck, and by a transient shimmer of gold on his pale hair.

Near the fireplace a seated female form stirred vaguely in the semi-darkness. A voice murmured :

‘I hear the post-boy’s horn. The omnibus is crossing the square. Listen, Augustine——’

A dull rumbling, borne from a distance, died away against the window-panes.

'Yes,' said the child; 'Monsieur Forgerus has arrived at Hautfort.'

'I am sorry he could not come this morning to your first communion, but he was tired after his long journey. He is a man of weak health.'

Augustine did not reply. He was turning the leaves of the old quarto volume—a heavy burden in his frail hands. It was a *Martyrology* of 1638, illustrated with line-engravings. Here were depicted glowing fires, colonnades, proconsuls in helmet and breastplate, bloated martyrs, bewigged lions, and enormous angels carrying palms, and floating head downwards in their billowy draperies.

'Shut your book. Night draws on. Jacqueline will bring the lamp directly,' resumed the voice. 'You can rejoin Monsieur and Mademoiselle Courdimanche on the terrace, if you like.'

'No, mamma. I would rather stop here with you.'

'Very well. The day of your first communion it is quite right to avoid even innocent pleasures. Rest in the thought of God, my son.'

'Oh! now I hear the carriage,' cried Augustine.

His forehead pressed against the cool panes, he awaited the appearance of the new guest on the steep road which mounted between two hedges to the house. This ancestral dwelling of the Chantepries, built on the extreme edge of a tableland, overlooks the abrupt incline on which Old Hautfort is spread out in terraces. On the right, the castle-keep crowns with its ruined towers the verdant masses of the municipal garden. The Bordier Gate,

another fragment of the fortress, spans the road which descends almost perpendicularly to the Church Square and Count Godefroy's Hospital. This arch of mossy stone frames a portion of the landscape—a medley of roofs, pavements, bluish backgrounds—all as clearly defined as a drawing by Albert Dürer. Half-way up the hill, St. John's of Hautfort displays a Renaissance doorway, a main edifice supported by Gothic buttresses, and a steeple restored in the seventeenth century. Between the brick arches of a small cloister one gets a bird's-eye view of the chapels and cypresses of the burial-ground. Here and there, among the groups of houses, may be had a glimpse of the angles and windings of the streets, and of the little squares planted with rows of lime-trees. The shades of evening melt into a grey harmony the sober violet of the slates, the vermilion of new tiles, and the reddish brown of old roofs. Smoke rises from the chimneys. Under the iridescent pallor of the vast sky the wooded and undulating country extends to right and left in a semi-circle, and towards the north an extensive slope reveals an horizon of plain—infinite as the sea, and, like the sea, of a greyish blue.

Not a sound, not the rumbling of a cart, not the whistling of an engine: silence—the silence of convents and of dead towns, where life seems to have resolved itself into remembrance and expectation.

Augustine de Chanteprie loved the little feudal town, possessing neither trade nor manufacture, fallen as it was, though quite near Paris, into a provincial torpor, but retaining in its ruins the

heroic and pious soul of the past. This landscape, with its mellow valleys, its woods of chestnut-trees and oaks, was indeed the 'gentle France' of the troubadours. And even the house, preserved from vandal 'improvements' and desecrating restorations, had not changed since 1636—since Jean de Chanteprie, chief magistrate, had settled there.

The names and faces of the members of the house of Chanteprie were familiar to the child—preserved in his memory as in a museum. There was Jean de Chanteprie, his great ancestor, the first friend of Port-Royal, who, during the Fronde, had, in his judicial robes, and accompanied by de Tillemont and de Bernières, conducted the procession of Jansenist nuns to St. André-des-Arcs. There were his three sons and his three daughters, his nephews, his descendants: Thérèse-Angélique, who died a nun at Port-Royal; Gaston, a refugee in Holland, with Antoine Arnauld and Père Quesnel; Agnes, the epileptic, who was cured of a paralysis of the limbs on the tomb of the deacon Pâris—and many others; Adhémar, the 'renegade,' the friend of the Encyclopedists; Jacques, returned as deputy to the Constituent Assembly; and those Chantepries of Holland, who had become reunited to the French branch by the marriage of two cousins, Jean and Thérèse-Angélique, whose only child Augustine was.

• He alone now, with his mother, represented this race of the Chantepries—a race obstinate and violent; walled round by its faith as by a prison, and—rigid with pride under its haircloth—capable of rising to the supremest heights of self-sacrifice and suffering.

And he, what would he be, what would he do? Were theological controversies still of vital interest to France? Could one still defend the faith by the sword, like Simon de Hautford, or by the pen and by word of mouth, like Gaston de Chanteprie? To crush heresy, to gain souls, to know God and make Him known, to love Him and make Him loved, such was the simple ambition, the absorbing dream, which Augustine de Chanteprie had avowed to his confessor.

A star shone out. Some of the windows gleamed. Along the road which outlined the escarpment of the keep a man advanced. He walked the length of the terrace-wall and stopped before the carriage-gate. The bronze knocker resounded.

'Mamma,' said Augustine, with emotion, 'it is Monsieur Forgerus.'

II

AN elderly servant, very tall, very thin, and wearing a black cap on her head, entered the drawing-room. She placed on the chimney-piece a common china lamp, whose light gave to the windows a bluish tinge, and revealed the gold of the frames and the bronzes of the Empire furniture. Monsieur Forgerus, with a slightly constrained air, stood, hat in hand.

He was a man of fifty, bald, with a grey beard, an aquiline nose, heavy eyebrows, and a firm and resolute look. He suggested the University and the Church. His frock-coat was very old-fashioned, and the cord by which his eyeglasses were suspended was broken and knotted in several places.

‘You are welcome, monsieur,’ said Madame de Chanteprie. ‘I hope you are not too tired by your long journey? Is Monsieur de Grandville quite well? He is not thinking of returning to France?’

‘The Abbé de Grandville is in perfect health, in spite of his great age,’ replied Monsieur Forgerus. ‘He belongs, body and soul, to his beloved college at Beyrouth. Indeed, if I could have stood the climate of Syria better, I should not have left my old friend. But I hope to return to him, madame, in seven or eight years, when your son no longer needs my tuition.’

Madame de Chanteprie called :

‘Augustine! come and thank Monsieur Forgerus, who is so good as to take charge of you.’

‘We shall be good friends, I am sure,’ said Forgerus, placing his hands on his pupil’s fair hair, as if to take possession of Augustine.

‘I will try to deserve your kindness, sir.’

The child seemed overcome by fatigue and by his feelings, and his lids drooped over the blue eyes, which looked like faded violets.

‘Go up to your room till dinner : Jacqueline will give you a light.’

‘Yes, my child,’ said the servant. ‘Come.’

Madame de Chanteprie had reseated herself, her figure upright, her elbows scarcely supported by the arms of the chair. Her refined face, between the bands of fair hair, expressed no other feeling than an immovable calmness. She had the sallow complexion of a recluse (rendered more sallow still by the startling whiteness of a plain collar), a high and rounded forehead, compressed at the temples, a finely modelled nose, a mouth sealed by the habit of silence, and eyes without light or colour, whose glance seemed ever directed within, probing the inmost mysteries of the soul.

‘I owe you the truth, madame,’ said Monsieur Forgerus. ‘When Monsieur de Grandville proposed that I should return to France to undertake the education of your son, the idea filled me with distaste. To think that I should leave the college we had founded together, abandon my pupils and my work, and all on the wretched pretext of my health! But Monsieur de Grandville insisted. He

described your character, your life, and how difficult it was for you to find a man who could teach and bring up your child, and yet keep him at your side. He declared that I was that man, in spite of my imperfections, and that I could not refuse a task imposed on me by God.'

'The Abbé de Grandville was right. You will be doing a useful work, monsieur, and your merit will be increased in the sight of the Lord, if, through your care, my son fulfils my hopes. From this day forth my house is open to you; my gratitude to you is assured. You know the history of the Chantepries? You know how they sacrificed affection, tranquillity, honours, fortune, to that which they believed to be the truth? Well, it is not their doctrine, but their constancy, which must be held up to Augustine as an example. Son of the Chantepries, he must remain a Chanteprie, clinging closer to his faith than to his worldly goods, his fortune, or his life. Yes, in this impious and flippant age, when so many Christians grow slack and dishonour their faith by compromises, I want my son to be a true Christian, a Christian in feeling and in action, scrupulous, firm, and uncompromising.'

'Quite so, madame,' said Monsieur Forgerus; 'there are no two ways of being a Christian.'

'The child is not spoilt. You will find he has a warm and simple heart. I may add that Augustine is very ignorant. A friend, Captain Courdimanche, has taught him after a fashion the elements of science and Latin. He has read nothing but the *Martyrology*, the *Lives of the Fathers in the Desert*, *Stories from the Bible*, and a few historical works.

He has never left Old Hautfort. He has no companions of his own age, and working in the garden is his greatest pleasure. So make whatever arrangements suit you as to his studies. I want Augustine to have a general education and a religious training. I do not regard him as a future scholar, officer, or magistrate: I want him to become a man and a Christian. God will reveal to him later on his particular vocation.'

Monsieur Forgerus smiled.

'I have known mothers of families who chose their sons' careers twenty years beforehand. They were still in leading-strings when their parents' pride announced: "You shall be a chief magistrate! You shall be a general! You shall become an academician!" or merely: "You shall make a fortune!" And these parents were Christians! Absorbed in the idea of providing the schools with another pupil, the Administration with another official, they scarcely bethought themselves of giving Christ another soldier, or the Church a defender. Religious education, the training of the conscience in Christian principles, they regarded all that as the business of the curate of the parish, whose duty it was to teach his parishioners their catechism. What is a "right-minded" young man? Why, a lad who has taken his first communion, and who retains a certain amount of feeling for his creed and for the clergy. But his love for his religion does not go so far as defending, or even practising, it.'

'Yes,' said Madame de Chanteprie; 'such young men have studied science, literature, the fine arts, but they know little' or nothing of Christian doctrine:

they have never read the books of our holy teachers. Reared in the schools of the poets and the pagans, they know nothing of the Fathers of the Church—St. Jerome, St. Ambrose, St. Augustine. Look at this portrait, monsieur: it is Gaston de Chanteprie. He was taught at the schools of Chesnai by Monsieur de Beaupuis. Our family records show that he was an austere Christian and a great scholar. His knowledge of the works of St. Augustine was marvellous, and he was a match for four Jesuits. With all his virtue and all his knowledge he was as simple as a child.'

Monsieur Forgerus raised the lamp to the picture. A dark doublet and dark hair were lost in the bitumen of the background, but the face emerged, a pale yet earnest face, lit up by a pair of blue eyes.

'It is a painting by Philip de Champaigne,' said the preceptor. 'I recognise the precision of outline and the sombre colouring of the old master.'

'After the exodus of the Chantepries to Holland, these portraits fell into the hands of my great-great-uncle Adhémar, who left them in his will to my great-great-grandfather. This Adhémar was a source of sorrow to his family by reason of the laxity of his mind and morals. He maintained that man is naturally good, and advocated "the return to Nature."'

'He was a disciple of Rousseau, a "man of sensibility!"'

'Yes, the sophist of Geneva had corrupted his mind and heart, and his depravity was completed by the reading of *Héloïse*. He had a summer resi-

dence built at the bottom of the garden, and a cluster of trees planted, which he called "Julia's Grove." This summer-house was destined to shelter a dancer, a certain Rosalba Rosalind, a fugitive from the opera, of whom the authorities were in search, that they might take her to a House of Repentance. For three years Monsieur de Chanteprie and this creature lived together in secret, and occupied themselves with music and gardening. They cultivated all the varieties of the poppy, Ad-hémar's favourite flower. At last one day the old man-servant who waited on them found Monsieur de Chanteprie prone on a bench in the Grove—dead of apoplexy. The Rosalind woman went to England.'

'And does the summer-house still exist?' asked Monsieur Forgerus.

'Certainly. I have had the first floor renovated, and you will find it a comfortable dwelling for yourself. In such wise this house of sin will become a house of study and of prayer. I have made up my mind not to interfere in the education of my son: a woman does not know how to bring up a man. You will therefore live under your own roof, waited on by Jacquine, free to go out at your pleasure and to receive whom you will.'

Monsieur Forgerus understood that Madame de Chanteprie did not care to shelter under her own roof an unmarried man, who was moreover no relation of hers.

'A thousand thanks, madame. But I shall scarcely make use of the liberty you grant me. I have no relations left, I have no friends, and I like solitude.'

Suddenly a sound of voices was heard in the lobby, and a door opened, giving ingress to a priest. An old gentleman and an elderly lady followed.

'We went as far as the ruins,' said the priest, 'and then Mademoiselle Cariste remembered it was the dinner-hour.'

'Father,' said Madame de Chanteprie, 'this is Monsieur Elias Forgerus, a professor at the French college at Beyrouth, who is good enough to undertake my son's education.' To Forgerus—'The curate of Hautfort—Mademoiselle Courdimanche—Captain Courdimanche.'

Jacquine announced :

'Dinner is ready.'

Greetings and polite speeches having been exchanged, the company adjourned to the dining-room.

This large apartment, paved with lozenge-shaped black and white tiles, and hung with a greenish paper, was only opened four times a year, on the days of the four principal festivals. Thérèse-Angélique de Chanteprie—Madame Angélique, as she was commonly called—never received any one there but the Abbé Le Tourneur, curate of Hautfort, and the elderly brother and sister, the Courdimanches.

The captain, sixty-five years of age, was somewhat ludicrous in appearance, owing to an absurdly prominent nose, and a bony chin which reminded one of Don Quixote. And in fact he *was* a Don Quixote, peaceful and amiable, with no love but the love of the poor, no infatuation but the infatuation of the Cross. In the courtyard of his house he reared rabbits by the hundred, and by their sale

increased 'the funds of charity.' Such as he was, with his comical profile, his left eye cut open by a bayonet-thrust and bathed in perpetual wateriness ; with his rough grey hair, his brushlike moustache, his tanned skin ; with his childlike piety, his hobbies and his rabbits, Captain Courdimanche deserved a place in Heaven beside Father Séraphique, the lover of Dame Poverty, and charmer of birds.

They said indeed that he had lived in indifference until his marriage, which took place late in life, and that the death of his pious young wife had worked the miracle of his conversion. But the captain had never altogether forgotten the religion he had practised from childhood, neglected somewhat during youth, and recovered with the first sorrow of his ripened manhood. To adore, to worship, to serve, was part of his nature. Simple in mind and in heart, incapable of reasoning and disputing, he had not 'become a Christian again,' he had never ceased to be one.

The captain's sister did not resemble him.

She preserved at fifty years of age an infantine and ingenuous charm, and was to all intents and purposes a child grown old. Through much frequenting of chapels, her gowns retained an odour of incense, hyacinths, and white roses. Her cheeks were as pale as the sacred host itself. Her hands seemed moulded out of the wax of new tapers. Mademoiselle Cariste had not the faintest inkling of love, curiosity, or ambition, that 'threefold lust' which is the effect of original sin. Her soul, wrapped in the torpor of innocence and ignorance, was still fresh from baptism. Her days were told off, one after another, like

the beads of an ivory rosary, marked by pious observances, petty worries, and petty pleasures. She embroidered altar cloths, made syrups and preserves, and darned the furniture-covers and the dazzlingly white window-curtains. Every time the hour struck she uttered an ejaculatory prayer which secured to her fifty days' indulgence. And this was happiness—the tepid happiness of an old maid, narrow as the cloister, pale as a northern spring.

The Abbé Le Tourneur, seated at her left, was assiduous in his attentions. Still young, good-looking, well-proportioned, with a full chin and a florid cheek, well-set eyes, and hair turning grey, he represented the finished type of the curate of a large parish—an excellent functionary and a perfect gentleman. For some years he had contributed to a newspaper published in the county-town, the *Rambolitaine Cross*, in which he preached harmony, indulgence, and unity 'among all honest people who were dissatisfied with the existing condition of things.'

He began now to tell of an interview he had had with his dean, the Curate of Little-Neauphle, and how a colleague of his, the young Curate of Rouvrenoir, had reproached him with being too good-natured and conciliatory.

'The abbé Vitalis is just fresh from college, and his apostolic zeal sometimes outruns his discretion. By over-urging indolent souls, one runs the risk of tiring and disgusting them. God does not will the death of the sinner.'

'He wills his conversion,' said Madame de Chanteprie.

‘I know you are severe on the lukewarm,’ replied Monsieur Le Tourneur, in a tone of affectionate respect. ‘Yes, of course, by disposition and temperament you are a Jansenist! I don’t doubt the purity of your faith!—And I recognise with admiration your—your inflexibility, which is naturally opposed to my opportunism, if I may borrow a word from the jargon of the schools. As for myself, I am merciful to those who want to give just a little of themselves to God. When they have engaged their little finger in the cause, I know well enough that their whole body will follow. There are many of these souls who belong to us still by the ties of tradition, habit, and—shall I say it?—cowardice. They scarcely exert themselves to gain paradise, but they are capable of a slight effort to avoid hell. Should one consign them to the devil? Ah! not at all. These indifferent, mediocre ones form the fluctuating crowd from which are recruited the small number of the elect—I would not wish to discourage or rebuff one of them. By means of temporising and profiting by favourable circumstances, I lead my flock whither they had no thought of going—perhaps not very near God, not into the first rank of the saints, but at all events a long way from the devil.’

‘But,’ said Forgerus, ‘Jesus did not love the lukewarm. He said: “I will spue them out of my mouth.” I am not sure that the extreme laxity of the priests strengthens the faith of the penitent. Remember the rigour of the bishops and popes in the primitive Church, when light speech, imprudent writings, and contempt of the sacraments were held

to be crimes and severely punished. Then fasting was frequent and rigorous, penance public and awful, and harshness of discipline produced sturdy souls.'

'One must advance with the times,' replied Monsieur Le Tourneur, somewhat embarrassed. 'But this discussion must weary, and perhaps disturb, our young friend. Well, Augustine my boy, so this great, this happy day, has come to an end.'

Monsieur Forgerus admired the adroit change of subject. The clever priest did not want to annoy Madame Angélique, and criticise her ancestors; and at the same time he gave a lesson in manners to the lay professor who dared to contradict him before Augustine, his catechumen of yesterday.

'He is a Molinist wandering in a strange country,' thought Forgerus, amused at the parallel. 'What is he doing here? We are in the midst of the seventeenth century. Is it not a sister of the Agneses and the Angéliques who is presiding over the meal? Does not Augustine resemble de Séricourt or de Luzanci as a child? Is it Mademoiselle Courdimanche or Mademoiselle de Vertus who is sitting near me? Is not the captain like de Pontis, or that de la Petitière who out of humility became the shoemaker of Port-Royal?'

Grace having been said, Mademoiselle Courdimanche asked for her shawl, and the guests took their leave of Madame de Chanteprie. Augustine had disappeared.

The old servant, with a lighted lantern swaying against her skirts, came to take Monsieur Forgerus to the summer-house. They crossed together a

lobby paved with black and white tiles, and went down a flight of three steps outside the house. Then the luminous torch lighted up a sanded courtyard and an avenue of limes, which made in the darkness two great walls of still denser darkness. Forgerus was dimly aware of a long terrace overhanging a black gulf, a half-ruined balustrade, and stone vases.

The odour of the night was fresh and wild; the perfume of the closed flowers had no part in it, but all the verdant and rural scents of grass, sap, and leaves united in an indefinable whole. It was like a prolonged and vibrant fragrance, in which were mingled the pungent odour of thyme, the keen odour of mint, and the insipid odour of elder.

‘Now you are at home, sir,’ said Jacqueline.

Raising her lantern, she showed the summer-house with its little arched balconies, and its round lattice windows under a slate roof. Through the cracked panes of the four windows and of the door one could see white inside shutters, with gilt moulding tarnished by the dust of a century. The door grated. Forgerus entered a hall which occupied the whole length of the ground-floor. The moulding of the wainscot was in trellis form, rounding out dome-like at the corners of the ceiling. Cupids bore aloft the emblems of gardening, or held the festoons of a garland woven of myrtle and poppies. The poppy crowned the pediment of the door, encircled the pedestal of a mutilated Flora, and blossomed in the interstices of the tessellated floor—emblem of the enchanted sleep in which old houses are fast bound.

The tutor understood the reasons, born of a sense

of propriety, which had banished him with his pupil to the bottom of the garden, behind 'Julia's Grove'; but he had not anticipated the romantic beauty of the summer-house, the decorations suggestive of gallantry, the heathen pictures which loomed before him. He sighed for the chief magistrate's house, the dwelling in which Madame Angélique lived and prayed alone, and which love had never profaned.

But the Man of the Poppies would not have recognised his retreat. Lines were hung aloft bearing dried herbs, bunches of onions, and strings of mushrooms. On the tessellated floor potatoes were heaped up, among crockery and old iron. A spider, rolled up in a ball, hung from a long invisible thread, and hairy moths, bewildered by the light, clung to the glass of the windows. Under Jacquine's feet a mouse scuttled away. The old woman scarcely noticed it. Lighted up from head to foot by the lantern, which threw her weird and distorted shadow on the ceiling, she looked like Cinderella's fairy godmother searching for the magic pumpkin or the whiskered rat. Her movements, by changing the position of light and shade, awoke reflections like mother-o'-pearl on the peel of the onions, and revealed the objects piled up on the floor; kettles covered with a fine, black, velvety soot, the brass of a candlestick, the red copper of a bulging saucepan, its appearance rendered whimsical by the vagaries of the light.

'Ah!' said the old woman, 'our Augustine, my dear child, used to come and play in this hall when he was quite little. Many a time have I taken him up the ladder to the loft, to let him see the odds and ends of past times, the broken pictures, the worn-out

chairs, the musical instruments that won't sound. There are all kinds of things up there—things belonging to the time before the Revolution! They were the property of my mistress's ancestor, the Man of the Poppies, as they call him.' She opened a door concealed in a panel, and revealed the passage which led to the staircase.

'Tell me, sir,' she went on, as she ascended the stairs, 'you won't make him work too hard, my little one? He is a delicate, thin-blooded child—his poor father died of consumption. He is used to gentleness, is our Augustine.'

'Reassure yourself, Jacquine; I will be gentle and patient.'

'When I say gentleness—you must understand what I mean—my mistress has never beaten him and never caressed him. She is a saint; she is not a mother like other mothers. She did not want to be married; she wanted to go into a convent. All her life she will be sorry she was not a nun. Well, here you are, sir. Your candle is there, by the bed, and here are matches. Good-night.'

She nodded to Forgerus as to an equal. Her step died away on the echoing stairs; the outer door grated dully, and all was silent.

III

MONSIEUR FORGERUS, who was up with the dawn, inspected his new dwelling. The only story of the house comprised three rooms, whose windows opened on the same frontage, and their doors on the same landing. To right and left two rooms, whose length was greater than their width, were similarly arranged. That of the tutor was furnished very simply with a bed, a table, and a chest of drawers of solid mahogany; but the other room had dainty woodwork, carved to represent myrtle and poppies, a chimney-piece of white marble, and an antique bedstead painted a soft grey, under a canopy of saffron-coloured Indian silk. In the large, square centre room were two deep cupboard-bookcases, with lattice doors lined with green silk. On the mantelpiece were out-of-date instruments of natural philosophy, a dusty globe contemporary with La Pérouse, and on the panels of the walls four line-engravings framed in black, representing Litolphi Maroni, Bishop of Bazas; Gondrin, Archbishop of Sens; Choart de Buzenval, Bishop of Beauvais; and Nicolas Pavillon, Bishop of Alet, in Languedoc.

Forgerus descended the stairs and crossed the 'Grove' of birches, acacias, ash-trees, and silvery poplars. The large house came into view, silent and closed, at the other end of the garden. The

parallel lines of the limes retreating towards it seemed to draw near each other and narrow the perspective. Between these walls of foliage a carpet of flower-beds was displayed, bordered by sombre ribbons of box, and cut up by paths into numerous rectangles. It was a French garden, precise as a tragedy, stately as an ode, in which the gardener's skill had foreseen and arranged everything, leaving nothing to the vagaries of nature. In former days, bathed in sunshine and monotony, with its closely shaven turf and its splashing fountains, with its quincunxes and its clipped hedges, it was admired as the masterpiece of Monsieur d'Andilly. But now, ruined by time, it was adorned by its ruin. The turf was nothing but meadow-grass, thick-set and perennial, which encroached on the paths among the dead leaves and stones. Badly clipped branches broke the line of the hedges, and here and there marble pedestals, which had supported brawny or graceful torsoes, rose like funeral monuments.

Monsieur Forgerus walked with slow steps up and down the terrace. A ray of light gilded obliquely the trunks of the lime-trees, and the faint tinkle of bells could be heard. The Angelus rose like the virginal voice of the dawn and the spring. The town spread out in the shape of a cross on the slope, and the woody and undulating horizon seemed transparent and unreal, painted like a cameo on blue gauze. The uncertain shades of green and mauve, and the dawning pinks, were so delicately mingled, that the fascinated vision did not trouble to distinguish them: it retained only the impression of

the whole, the vagueness of a blue panorama, faintly blue, and on the point of disappearing.

'Hallo!' cried some one, 'you are very early, sir!'

Forgerus perceived Jacquine kneeling near a square green bed. He noticed the woman's singular countenance, her thin, hooked nose, her yellowish, somewhat deep-set eyes, fixed and fascinating like owls' eyes.

'You are hungry, perhaps? I'll go and bring your breakfast.'

'I take nothing before midday, Jacquine. Don't trouble about me.'

'Why?' she said suspiciously. 'Is it for some religious reason?'

Forgerus smiled—

'Perhaps.'

'Like my mistress, then. Yes, you are a pious man, and she is a saint. The country-folk call her the Saint. But tell me, you will let the little one have some breakfast?'

'Certainly.'

'That's right. He has his father's constitution, has that child.'

'You knew Monsieur de Chanteprie, Jacquine?'

'I came to Hautfort when I was fifteen with my first master, a doctor—a learned man who taught me a good many things. When he was at the point of death he got me a situation with Madame Angélique's mother, and I have never left the house since. But I have not liked living in this part of the country. People have been very unkind to me. They came and asked me to look after sick people

whom the doctors had given up, because I know of healing plants and words; and then they called me a witch, and one who had the evil-eye, and the old "Chavoche."

'Chavoche?'

'A "chavoche" is a screech-owl. All the same, I brought up Madame Angélique; I fastened on her wedding-veil; I received her child when he was born; I buried his poor father—a young man of twenty-five, thin and pale and always coughing. A fine match for a girl! Indeed, I told my late mistress that a marriage between cousins brings no good; but they are an obstinate family. The girl wept for her dear convent; but they told her that "her vocation was not certain." So, out of obedience to her parents, she consented. And our Augustine was born. Oh! I loved that child even before he was born. I was already old. I thought the pretty little mite would bring back joy to the house; but it was too late! The master was dying. The mistress gave herself up to piety. She is a woman who thinks only of death.'

'One must think of death, Jacquine, if one wants to live as a Christian.'

'Well, well,' said the old woman, 'we have only one life: we must make the best of it, and leave the dead alone. The poor dead are dead indeed.'

Crouched on her heels, she pulled a handful of herbs which she culled carefully.

'What plants are you gathering there?'

'Oh, they are good herbs, healing herbs, better than all the doctors' drugs. I cultivate and gather them, and make syrups and infusions of them,

balsams for compresses, and remedies for sprains and burns.'

'Are you the gardener here?'

'Gardener, seamstress, cook, housemaid—Madame Angélique spends all her income in charity, she can't keep several servants. There's a woman who helps me with the washing, and a man who sometimes does heavy jobs.'

She rose, gathering in her knotty hands the skirt of her apron with its burden of leaves and flowers. A lock of hair, which had escaped from her cap, fell down her temple and writhed like a silver snake. A small turquoise was set in a ring hanging from her left ear, and the pure blue of the stone seemed still more blue against the brown cheek.

Tall, thin, with yellow eyes whose lids never blinked, she had the inhuman majesty of the Sibyls. Guardian of magic herbs, mistress of charms and balsams, she seemed indeed a witch whom the morning had taken unawares, and who retained in her woman's guise some of the metamorphoses of the night. Would she take root among the deadly nightshade, or fly away to the ruins on owls' wings?

'I am going to wake my boy. It is the last time. To-night he will sleep in the room I have arranged, as in the old days, with the furniture that was in the loft of the summer-house. Good-bye, sir.'

'Good-bye, Jacqueline.'

Forgerus went along the terrace again, and found a door of exit behind the summer-house. A few steps brought him to the municipal garden, near the old tenth-century tower whose solid mass was buried under the arborescent ivy. In the distance rose

another tower, embattled, and pierced with Gothic windows. Through the elms and chestnuts one could see, far below, the wide country, stacks of hay, apple-trees in the fields, plane-trees planted by the roadsides, and the green lines of the hedges which meandered down the slope of the plateau.

A winding path led Forgerus to the lane he had traversed by twilight the night before. He passed under the Bordier Gate. The townspeople at their windows, the shopkeepers' wives collected round the fountain and before the church-door, a worthy in white trousers, with a panama on his head, a woman coming from mass, her hands clasped under her cape, the houses of unequal size, the inferior shops, the primitive signs, recalled to Forgerus the provincial scenery and the characters of Balzac.

Out of curiosity he visited the burial-ground, whose Gothic doorway excited his attention.

From the entrance could be seen the closely packed gravestones of the enclosure, a square patch of sky, the side of an overhanging mound, and the red and brown tiles of the sloping roofs. The cloister enclosed only three sides. The framework of the archway, curved in and resembling the skeleton of the sea Leviathan, was propped up by buttresses of brick. The sun shone on the window-panes of a little chapel supported by arches, and cast on the paving-stones a bluish flickering light.

Forgerus examined the commemorative tablets affixed to the wall. The oldest bore a long Latin inscription. Under the flags, trampled on by the feet of passers-by, reposed *in spem resurrectionis* Messire Jean de Chanteprie, chief magistrate, Dame

Catherine Le Féron, his wife, M^{ess}ire Jacques de Chanteprie, Messire Gaston de Chanteprie, who died at Utrecht in 1709, and 'Sister Thérèse-Angélique de Chanteprie, who died at Port-Royal, the 14th of May 1661, and was exhumed the 4th of April 1711.' More recent inscriptions recalled the names of Pierre de Chanteprie, Dame Juliette Silvat, his wife, and Jean de Chanteprie, their son.

'Adhémar is not buried in the family vault,' thought Forgerus.

He went out to see the adjoining church, dedicated to St. John. Mass was just over. There was no one before the altar, except a kneeling woman, and a sacristan in a surplice too short for him, arranging pots of white flowers.

A golden light fell from the high ground-glass windows on to the central nave, but the transepts were wrapped in gloom, and the famous stained windows of the Renaissance gleamed with a warm and tempered brilliance—a brilliance intenser than that of jewels.

At the end, at the apses of the church, the tree of Jesse, ascending from the side of sleeping Abraham, put forth its branches laden with patriarchs and kings; and at the sides the legends of the Bible, the parables of the Gospel, and the acts of the saints were inscribed in luminous symbols set in outlines of lead.

There could be seen the good Samaritan and Mary Magdalene, the prophets in the desert and Christ at the sepulchre. The characters wore the clothing of the sixteenth century, and the influence of the Italian masters was apparent in the theatrical

attitudes, the abnormal muscular development, and the splendour of the draperies. Citizens rode on horseback, clothed in velvet and furs. Apostles with curled beards wore billowy yellow robes, shaded with violet. The holy women were ravishing, with their fair hair under their pointed hoods, and the greyish white of their frilled collars. The tortured landscape, minute in detail, displayed at the same time rocks, cedars, the winding convolutions of a stream, little paths across the level ground, tiny ball-like trees, all the houses of the towns, and all the windows of the houses. In the lower part of the window the donor and his wife, in a kneeling attitude, were scrupulously reproduced in all their original ugliness.

Elias Forgerus scarcely stopped to look at them. He was already reproaching himself with the length of his walk, and the happiness he had felt in presence of the daily miracle of the dawn. He had actually postponed his hour of meditation, seduced by the fascination of the light—that ‘queen of colours’ of whose sweetness and strength St. Augustine spoke. His eyes, for many a long day turned away from Nature, were accustomed to seek only the light which is not of this world, the light which Jacob and blind Tobias saw. And art, even Christian art, disquieted Forgerus still more than Nature.

He recalled strange sensations of his childhood, when his mother took him from church to church, in the half Spanish town where they lived. Madame Forgerus was a brown, withered, plain-looking woman, with magnificent eyes, in whose depths burned all the fires of the Inquisition. She loved

her husband and her son with a love prone alike to endearments and to neglect, of a facile arrogance and yet rejoicing in humiliation. And she loved God in the same fashion, a fashion subtle yet violent. The gloom of crypts, the fearful images of death and decay, the agonising ecstasies of tears, all the materialism of worship attracted her. Her devotion was like a Spanish votive offering—a brilliant and hollow golden heart, hung to the pedestal of a statue of the Virgin.

Brought up by this woman, Forgerus was very near becoming a falsely pious and falsely sentimental youth, imbibing passionate excitement from sacred hymns, flowers, incense, nay—even the Virgin's smile; and this recollection filled him with shame. Nowadays he repudiated the sacrilegious intrusion of literature into religion, and the false grandeur, the unwholesome charm which religion derives from art. Is not art the snare in which the blind, deluded soul in search of pious emotion finds a carnal and dangerous pleasure?

Forgerus determined to accustom his pupil to true piety, which needs not the help of the senses for the maintenance of its fervour. And the image of Augustine, evoked by this thought, softened the tutor's heart. Elias loved children; their condition seemed to him terrible, demanding the utmost care and the deepest compassion. A child is like an embryo town, without walls or gates, in which the Holy Spirit does not dwell as yet, and whose reason cannot yet defend it. Evil prowls around him; and he does not fight against Evil, because he is ignorant of it, and he is conquered by Evil, because

he is a sinful son of Adam. His tutor must watch over him, instruct him more by example than by precept, and save him in working out his own salvation.

'Lord,' prayed Forgerus, 'well do I know how rash it is to attempt to lead others when one has not been able to lead oneself aright. But even if the result of my care were to fulfil my hopes, ought I to pride myself on that? The gardener prunes the young plant, straightens it, subjects it to discipline; he protects it against frost and heat; he destroys harmful insects; but it is not he who makes the seed germinate, the sap flow, and the flower open. Accept, then, I pray Thee, the humble services of the gardener. Temper the wind and the rain, the sun and the shade, to the frail human plant. I shall work on its behalf; it will bloom for Thee.'

I V

THE new life began.

Every morning at six o'clock, Monsieur Forgerus woke his pupil. Oral lessons and pious exercises succeeded each other, brief and varied, in order not to weary the child's attention. These were interspersed with recreation and walks. No visits, no holidays: the days followed each other without a barren hour, and each day was exactly like the preceding.

It was an old-fashioned education, such as Monsieur Lancelot might have given to the young princes de Conti. Monsieur Forgerus had passed from college to seminary, from seminary to college. Alarmed by the grandeur of the priesthood, alarmed by the corruption of the world, he had remained half lay and half clerical. He knew nothing of the passions excepting through books, and theology and the *belles-lettres* had been his only mistresses.

Mathematics and works on mechanics interested him, but he was on the whole indifferent to the progress of science, and possibly condemned, at the bottom of his heart, 'that searching out of the secrets of nature which do not concern us,' as Jansen says, 'which it is useless to know, and which men only want to know for the sake of knowing them.'

Madame de Chanteprie approved the tutor's pro-

gramme and methods. She believed a thorough instruction in the humanities, a sound moral and religious education, and a smattering of science sufficed to equip 'an upright man.' Augustine de Chanteprie was not destined to shine in salons. If he had no vocation for the priesthood he would remain, like his father and grandfather, a simple country gentleman, occupied with rural pursuits and good works.

Twice a week, on Sundays and on Thursdays, she received Monsieur Forgerus, and every day, at a fixed hour, Augustine was admitted to her presence. The child regarded with a feeling of awe and respect the cell-like room, the Jansenist Christ with extended arms, the wretched furniture, and the constantly ailing woman who was always reading pious works and sewing for the poor. Between mother and son there were no familiarities, little freedom of intercourse, and few caresses. Augustine scarcely dared speak to her; and yet, banished to the summer-house, he regretted his mother. It pained him to live no longer in the shadow of her gown, under the benison of her hands, in the great silence which dwelt around her. He worshipped her. She was a revered being, gentle in her majesty, terrible in her gentleness — Mother, Queen, and, above all, Saint!

From his childhood Augustine involuntarily associated this glorified image of his mother with all his religious feelings. From the beginning of the year to the end a regular succession of religious ceremonies enclosed in a mystic circle the souls of mother and son. Together they greeted the star

of the Epiphany; together they saw the priest sprinkling with ashes the humbled foreheads of the faithful; together they breathed at the tomb of Jesus the funereal perfume exhaled by flowers whose petals were falling and by hot melting wax; together they listened for the sound of the Easter bells, borne on the breezes of spring. The Catholic festivals were the only important dates of their life, and Jesus, the Virgin, and the Saints were as present in their thoughts, and as well known as if they had been intimate friends.

Neither the devotion of Jacqueline nor the friendship of the Courdimanches had had the effect of diverting Augustine from this filial adoration. And yet, with Jacqueline, or at the house of Mademoiselle Cariste, the little dreamer, over gentle and over grave as he usually was, became a chattering urchin. The old servant opened up Nature to his budding imagination, so prone to run on the church, heaven, and hell. Augustine amused himself in the herb garden, and in the pantry full of queer vessels, basins, and alembics. Jacqueline knew so many stories of gendarmes and poachers, so many plaintive ballads about nightingales, and maidens who died for love! Leaning over the boiling syrup, she sang the 'Fatal Marriage,' shaking her head and smiling inscrutably. Her voice was as thin as the tone of a spinet, her fingers more knotty than vines. The sun, filtering through the window-panes, across the savoury steam, illuminated her silver snakelike locks, and the turquoise hanging at her ear. The 'Chavoche' was so tender, so amusing, and withal so uncanny!

People who hated her used nevertheless to come sometimes in a mysterious way to see her, for she knew of marvellous plasters to relieve pain, and of roots to put under the pillows of children in convulsions, and of draughts which cured colic and fever. And they even said that a man in her part of the country had taught her to discover springs with a hazel wand. But Jacquine dared not admit and put into practice all her talents. She had no personal objection to obliging people for nothing, and loved to exercise her gifts, but she feared lest her reputation as a miracle-worker should come to the ears of Madame de Chanteprie.

Mademoiselle Courdimanche did not like the 'Chavoche.' Jacquine went to church, like everybody else, 'because human beings are not like dogs.' Possibly she believed in God. And yet, she was 'not a good Catholic!' These words, oftentimes repeated, troubled Augustine. He prayed earnestly for his old nurse, and implored Jesus to enlighten her, to save her. 'O God,' he said, 'if Thou wilt have me happy in Thy paradise, take thither, I pray Thee, all those I love: mamma, Mademoiselle Cariste, Monsieur Courdimanche, and Jacquine.'

There could be no doubt that Madame de Chanteprie would go to heaven all right, and the Courdimanches too. Mademoiselle Cariste had been amassing indulgences for over forty years! She never let the hour strike without murmuring the prayer, 'Heart of Jesus, save me!' which spared her fifty days of purgatory. Sometimes she was inclined to perform what the Abbé Le Tourneur called 'the act of heroism,' namely, the relinquishing

of all these indulgences in favour of suffering souls, but a weak cowardice had hitherto checked on her lips the formula of renunciation. Mademoiselle Cariste was afraid of hell. By way of precaution she wore two scapularies, some relics, and, on her wrist, a consecrated rosary. On stormy days she lighted an end of wax candle, given her by the curate. Augustine had spent happy hours in her little drawing-room, crouching against her skirts, listening to anecdotes taken from the *Annals of the Holy Childhood*, or the *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith*. These stories intoxicated the child. He dreamt of being a big-bearded missionary, preaching the gospel to savages whose heads were decorated with feathers, and finding the martyr's crown in a far-distant Chinese town. Already he saw the stake, the red-hot tongs, the assemblage of yellow-skinned men, and the mandarin in his pointed hat—and from the depths of his childish soul he pardoned his murderers.

‘You shall be a priest,’ said Mademoiselle Cariste; ‘you will be a bishop, perhaps even a cardinal. What glory for the town!’

But the child shook his fair head.

‘I want to be a martyr.’

Moved by the words, the old maid would divert his thoughts by lending him a pair of blunt scissors with which to cut out pictures. The white Virgin on the mantelpiece smiled between the china lamps. Squares of parchment displayed pious mottoes inscribed on pink streamers, wreathed by garlands of myosotis. The light was feeble and chill, and when the solemn notes of the wooden clock broke the

silence, a sigh could be heard, a whispered 'Heart of Jesus, save me!'

Mademoiselle Cariste worked out her salvation at home, with cool head and warm feet, reading the *Religious Weekly* or the *Pilgrim*. The captain worked out his salvation by means of good works. Winter and summer he visited the poor, he watched the sick, he helped to bury the dead. His devotion excited occasional derision. Even those whom he helped in their distress accounted him a maniac. In vain had Monsieur Le Tourneur attempted to interest the worthy man in the success of municipal candidates patronised by the clergy. Monsieur Courdimanche could not turn his attention from charity to electioneering tactics. Indifferent alike to encyclicals, mandamuses, and all the temporal affairs of the Church, he regarded only the suffering members of Christ Jesus—the poor.

Augustine respected Mademoiselle Cariste; he revered the captain; but the old man's goodness was of such a humble, unobtrusive order, that the child did not appreciate all its greatness. Attracted by contemplative piety, he invariably reverted to his mother as the earthly image of Perfection.

The strength of this maternal sway did not altogether please the tutor. Forgerus recalled Madame de Chanteprie's significant words: 'A woman does not know how to bring up a man.' He regarded woman with a wholly Christian suspicion. She was the enemy. Having always lived apart from her, he feared and did not love her. He often recalled his mother's indiscreet tenderness, her indulgence, her anger, the violent outbursts which astounded and

embarrassed him. She had sent him to the seminary out of jealousy, without troubling about his vocation, hoping to give him to God, rather than to a rival—a mistress or a wife. And her fury when he gave it up! Yes, woman conceives in sin; the lust of Eve passes, with her blood and her milk, into the flesh of the future Adam. The woman cherishes her male child more than her daughter, in whom the father lives again; she loves him with a love which, by its very ardour, reveals the obscure attraction of sex. It is the son whom she tries to mould to the image of her dream; it is in him that she attempts to begin again a stronger and more untrammelled life. He is the living compensation for her weakness and her servitude. For twenty years she broods over him, and when he tears himself from her, he carries with him a longing for her arms and her bosom. Son of a woman, to woman he returns.

This thought possessed Forgerus when he watched his pupil, who had become his well-beloved son in the spirit. He was only a child, peaceful and pure; but sometimes the master saw rise up before him the attractive face of the young man whose creation so few years would suffice to effect. Few years, indeed—too few. But yesterday, fortified with the symbolic chrism, he would soon have to quell his clamouring senses. Soon, disturbed by the warmth of midday and the languor of eve, uneasy without cause and sad without reason, he would enter on that terrible season of youth whose first rays madden the senses like the suns of spring. Soon the impure Enemy would prowl around this blossoming soul.

Passionately devoted to his work, Elias hoped to

hold Augustine in his hand, to fashion him at will. He gave himself up entirely to his pupil, in order to possess him entirely. Ready for any sacrifice, any devotion, he resented the least opposition.

By his order, Augustine had to give up Jacquine's society, as well as gardening, songs, and the magic cooking operations of the laboratory. The foolishness of Mademoiselle Cariste might be dangerous, and lower his spiritual tone: farewell, therefore, the visits to the little white drawing-room, the little sweet tit-bits, the pious stories! Captain Courdimanche was admitted, at long intervals, at his time of recreation. And henceforth the disciple belonged unreservedly to the master. Even his mother seemed to be effaced.

V

THE years passed. The white poppies in the terrace urns blossomed and shed their petals seven times. Madame Angélique no longer went out. But all the girls of Hautfort knew that Monsieur de Chanteprie had fair hair and eyes as tender as violets, and they were sorry that he was a saint.

He was rarely to be met in the town, and then almost always with his tutor, whose aspect scared away coquettes. 'There are the gentlemen from Chanteprie,' said the small children. Then Julie, the dressmaker, would come to the threshold of her shop in a pink bodice. Bertha, Jeanne, and Cora, with arms entwined, would bar the way and burst into loud giggles. Martha, the ironer, would raise her muslin curtain, and, in front of the farrier's yard, full of shouting, sparks, and the kicking of horses, little Mélie, a sixteen-year-old consumptive, would shiver more audibly under her shawls, and follow the young man with a sad and jealous look.

Augustine did not look at girls. And they all called him proud and shy, a little 'touched,' no doubt, like his parents: 'with a vocation for the priesthood, and destined for a seminary.'

Mademoiselle Courdimanche had spread this report in the town. It seemed impossible to her

that the 'little angel' had not a vocation. She tried to sound the young man. Augustine replied quite candidly that the priestly office, beautiful and grand as it was, frightened him. He had not yet experienced the inward emotion, the decisive impulse of grace. At nineteen years of age, having finished his studies, he was beginning to administer his estate, with the seriousness of a young Roman—king in his house, king on his lands. Testard, the farmer of Chêne-Pourpre, taught him agriculture. And his rustic labours, while strengthening his health, left him time for meditation and reading. Augustine was perfectly happy. His faith was no weaker, his piety no less scrupulous, than on the day after his first communion. Strict as regarded himself, gentle towards others, he despised worldly pleasures, of which he knew nothing, and the pleasures of the senses, at which he only guessed, and for which he felt a disgust mingled with fear. Divine love filled his soul, and veiled the dawning capacity for love of another sort.

Monsieur Forgerus, satisfied with his work, was thinking of leaving him. Before rejoining Monsieur de Grandville, he wanted to make a short retreat at the Cistercian abbey of Saint Marcellin, whose prior had been his friend from childhood. This was the first separation for seven years, and master and pupil called it, in melancholy fashion, the 'preparatory test.'

'I shall return in a week, and shall then stay several weeks with you,' Forgerus had said when bidding him good-bye on the platform of the railway station.

Augustine returned alone to Old Hautfort. The old two-wheeled carriage jolted unmercifully when he put the little grey pony to a trot. Smooth, speckled plane-trees bordered the high-road on either side, and in the red sunset the landscape stretched out, pale-toned and dusty, between the curves of the hills.

At the entrance to the town Monsieur de Chanteprie made a detour to avoid the steep ascent and the shocking pavement of the streets. A lane bordered by woods and gardens swallowed him up in its sombre shadow, and while his horse climbed the hill the young man indulged in dreams. Like a half-roused sleeper he seemed to see his thoughts dancing in the sun, like misty, glittering butterflies.

Suddenly a voice—clear, imperious, and childish in tone—called him :

‘Sir! Sir!’

With an involuntary movement Augustine drew rein. The horse stopped short, and Monsieur de Chanteprie, turning round, saw a young girl following the carriage.

‘Sir,’ she repeated, ‘are the three cross roads up this way?’

‘Straight in front of you.’

‘Will it take long to get there?’

‘A quarter of an hour.’

‘And is it all uphill?’

‘Yes.’

‘Oh, how tired I am!’ sighed the wayfarer in a piteous tone.

She was carrying a large parcel tied in a cloth, and as she threw back her head and shoulders one

could see under her blue print frock the firm outline of her girlish bosom and the roundness of her hip. Her collar was unfastened and displayed a triangle of firm flesh, moist with perspiration. And under the common straw hat, tied with a black ribbon, her plump face, framed with auburn hair, looked like a glowing rose.

'Oh, how tired I am! and this is so heavy! and I am dreadfully hot!'

The young man felt sorry for her.

'Do you come from far?'

'From Little Neauphle.'

'And where are you going?'

'To Old Hautfort, to see my aunt.'

'Give me your parcel. You can have it again when we reach the cross-roads.'

He took the bundle and put it in the carriage. Then he felt ashamed at seeing this poor child blistering her feet on the stones.

'Get in yourself, since you are so tired. You can rest a bit.'

'Oh, gladly, sir! I could not refuse. You are very kind.'

With a jump she was at his side, and almost at the same moment he sprang to the ground, and began to lead the horse by the bridle, without speaking to the young girl, or even looking at her.

She murmured:

'Sir?'

'Well?'

'If you would be so good, sir, could you tell me where my aunt lives?'

'You don't know where your aunt lives?'

'I have not seen her for ten years. She is in service at Old Hautfort with gentlefolk. I am on my way to see her before going to a situation in the country. My aunt's name is Jacquine—Jacquine Férou.'

'Jacquine!'

'It's a funny name, isn't it? My name is Georgette.'

Augustine looked at her.

She was a girl of sixteen, a woman already. Her face looked younger than her figure. There was something quite childish in the moulding of her chin, in her greenish eyes, in the delicate tints of her cheeks, where her smile evoked charming dimples.

'I will take you to your aunt,' said the young man.

And he uttered not another word.

The carriage stopped at the three cross-roads. Augustine whistled. A young groom ran out, and was amazed at seeing 'the master' with a strange, badly-dressed girl, picked up on the road.

'Honoré, go and find Jacquine, and tell her that her niece has come. Good-day, mademoiselle, you can wait here.'

He went off, disturbed in mind, and angry with Georgette and with himself.

An hour later he found his mother in the dining-room. Jacquine was in attendance. What had they done with Georgette? Had they sent her away without allowing her even a short rest?

'Jacquine had a visitor to-day,' said Madame Angélique; 'her little niece came to see her.'

Augustine blushed and was silent, his head bent over his plate.

'Our poor old nurse is not well,' continued his mother. 'She would like somebody to help her in making preserves for a few days; for here we are at midsummer and the currants are quite ripe. The girl is going to stay here for a short time, and Jacquine will get some rest.'

'Madame is very good,' said Jacquine; 'the child will sleep in my room, and won't be in any one's way.'

'Look after her well. You are responsible for her, Jacquine. Don't let her go out alone, and gad about the streets of Hautfort. And remember that she must never go to the summer-house: Augustine does not like to be disturbed.'

'Yes, I understand. Our Augustine shall not be disturbed.'

Madame de Chanteprie spoke no more of the auburn-haired girl; but the next day Augustine caught sight of Georgette in the kitchen-garden. She had discarded her shabby frock, and was wearing a gown of Jacquine's—a black dress which was too long and too high for her, and which squeezed her terribly. With a blue apron tied round her waist, a basket on her arm, and her hat pulled down over her forehead, she was gathering ripe currants. From a distance, through the hedge which divided the kitchen-garden from the garden proper, one could see her coil of ruddy hair, shining in the sunlight.

The currant-picking lasted two days; for two days Augustine saw the wonderful hair gleaming between the trees. The third day he did not see Georgette, and the fourth day he began to wonder whether she had gone. He wanted her to go, with-

out understanding the singular antipathy with which the poor girl—a mere child!—inspired him.

Should he question his mother or Jacqueline? He dared not. But, as he was walking in the garden, he turned his steps towards the kitchen-garden by a path so shady that it remained dark and cool at midday. At the end the thorn hedge barred its width. It was like a long, dark passage, flecked here and there with patches of dancing light.

Monsieur de Chanteprie looked stealthily through the hedge.

Under the burning sky the ground cracked, and the vegetation was shrivelling up and dying of thirst. Cabbages, eaten up by the caterpillars, displayed their grey-green, full-blown leaves, riddled with holes. On the twigs driven into the ground the pea-blossoms looked like a flight of butterflies suddenly arrested and killed by the burning sun, their white wings quivering no longer.

Seated against the hedge Georgette was stripping currants from their stalks, and throwing them into a copper basin. The old trees cast a cool and uncertain shadow over her. Her hair, caught in the thorns, wove a golden web around her head, the coils forming its shining centre. Her breathing could be heard in the silence.

Augustine leaned forward. He saw the childish cheek, the fair neck, fairer still in the green reflection of the trees, the sleeves turned back, the arms and hands stained pink by the rosy juice of the fruit. And, leaning further forward, he saw the black gown unhooked, he had a glimpse of white linen, and of a firm, purple-veined bosom, delicate as a flower.

He dared neither stay nor go. And if Georgette had turned round at that moment he would have died of shame.

Suddenly he thought she moved, and, possessed by a strange terror, he ran to the summer-house, trampling leaves and breaking branches on his way.

The shutters, closed since the morning, had kept the room as cool as a woodland grotto. A streak of daylight divided them—a long thread of brilliant sunshine. The saffron-coloured curtains, hung from a canopy of carved wood, spread softly over the bed, contrasting with the pearl-grey woodwork. And the harmony between the pale grey and tender yellow was delightful.

Augustine was trembling. His heart beat violently. What evil had he done? Why this wild flight, this emotion? Alas! something had come into his life, something fearful and wonderful which he could never forget, and which would always be with him. And this dizziness of mind, this fever of the blood, this was that Desire, Sin, Lust, of which the holy books spoke.

On his knees, before the crucifix, Augustine prayed, beating his breast, bewailing his guilty curiosity. And his emotion grew calmer. He bathed his forehead and temples with cold water. But, in spite of himself, amid this dim-tinted furniture with its feminine curves, in the atmosphere of this room made for pleasure, strange thoughts and visions assailed him. He thought he saw pass, between the window and the bed, a shadowy face, transparent as mist, and crowned with poppies—a phantom!

They had told him the story, how Adhémar de Chanteprie had concealed a dancer, Rosalba Rosalind, in the summer-house. The dead returned. With her bygone finery and her withered garlands, she returned to the house of love, the house of sin—awakened from the slumber of a hundred years by the fragrance of youth.

VI

THE dog barked, pulling at his chain and growling furiously, and Mother Testard, wondering what was the matter, came from the rabbit-hutch. She saw a young woman trying to open the yard-gate—four uneven planks of wood held together by a transverse bar. The latch would not yield, the dog howled, and on the road from Chêne-Pourpre, which lay white in the sunlight, an old lady was waving her parasol and exclaiming :

‘Fanny! take care!—that dog is fierce!’

‘Fierce? He is performing his duty as a dog, and I esteem him for it. Don’t be afraid, aunt, he won’t eat us.’

Mother Testard, clattering her wooden shoes, rushed out among the alarmed poultry. The gate yielded, the dog was silent, and the two women entered. They were ‘Parisians,’ she decided. In Mother Testard’s eyes all well-dressed people were Parisians. A lace veil concealed the face of the younger woman. The elder had a little wrinkled countenance, whose vivacity was both amusing and fatiguing to watch. She was carrying a hand-bag, several parcels, and a parasol, and Mother Testard drew back from the dangerous proximity of all these articles, which rattled and jumbled against each other in a somewhat alarming fashion.

‘What do you want?’

‘I want to see Monsieur de Chanteprie.’

‘Monsieur de Chanteprie? He is not here.’

‘Then what did the postman mean? He sent me here. I have come about the little house, you know.’

‘Oh! you have come to buy the “Three Limes”? Would you come in a moment and rest, ma’am? The master will be here directly—Monsieur de Chanteprie, I mean. We are his tenants.’

‘Will you come into the house, Fanny?’

‘No, aunt. Go and rest in the shade. I’ll amuse myself looking at the yard.’

‘I’m afraid it’s not very tidy,’ said the farmer’s wife. ‘The buildings are all dreadfully tumble-down. They want repairing badly. Ah, if only our landlord were like other men! He loves everything old, and won’t interfere with ancient things.’

‘Is your master an old man?’

‘He’s about twenty-three.’

‘And is he rich?’

‘Not very rich, and yet not poor. Nobody knows exactly. His mother gives everything to the priests. They are gentlefolk.’

‘I fancy I can see the gentleman,’ said the young woman, laughing, ‘a pupil of the Jesuits, the picture of gentility, as virtuous as a statue; a most excellent youth with lank hair and large feet.’

‘What an idea, Fanny! Are you going to stay here? I’ll go and rest in the house. Don’t let me disturb you, my good woman.’

But Mother Testard, whose tone had now become obsequious and plaintive, followed the old lady’s steps.

Fanny leant her elbows on the rickety gate. On the other side of the road the level country, covered partly with wheat and partly with heather, and girdled by woods, gave forth its spring perfume, that verdant perfume which intoxicates men and beasts. And Fanny, whom the walk and the fresh air had made somewhat languid, basked in the mild sunshine, and looked at the immense circle of woods, the humble dwellings of Chêne-Pourpre, all clustered together on the same side of the road, and a distant, moving speck, which proved to be a carriage.

The carriage stopped before the farm. A young man alighted from it, and passed in front of the young woman. He was tall and slight, and dressed in a brown velvet suit. In ten seconds he had raised his hat to the stranger, opened the gate, and crossed the yard. And the dog welcomed the master with a joyful bark.

In the house there now ensued a medley of voices and of confused explanations, and suddenly the old lady came out accompanied by the young man.

'Fanny,' she cried, 'Monsieur de Chanteprie says he will show us the house. Three rooms, a woodshed, a garden, and trees; silence, shade, and a charming view. Does that suit you?'

'It must suit you first of all, aunt. I shan't be in my house, but in yours—and that only during the summer months.'

'You will be in your own house when you are in mine, my dear child, and you can stay there as long as you like. Yes, monsieur, if I buy your house I shall scarcely ever live in it. I have a married son

in New York; I cross over to Paris every four or five years. Monsieur Lassauguette, my husband, was a learned man, an astronomer, a genius, whom France did not appreciate. I no longer love anything or any one in France, monsieur, except this child, my goddaughter, whom out of affection I call my niece. It is for her that I am going to buy your house, so that she may have a harbour of refuge in case of misfortune, and may work at her ease. She is an artist—a true artist—Madame Fanny Manolé, daughter of the great painter Corvis. Have you not seen her pastels at the Salon? Do speak, Fanny, say something! What are you thinking about?’

‘I am thinking, my dear aunt, that our affairs cannot interest Monsieur de Chanteprie. We must make haste.’

Augustine looked at the young woman. Standing in the morning sunshine, against a background of heather and sky, clothed in a mauve gown and hat, with a little sable necklet round her throat, her black eyes and her gleaming teeth shining through the embroidered tulle of her veil, she looked like a living violet, and, like the landscape, she breathed of the spring.

‘Let us go,’ said Monsieur de Chanteprie.

After leaving the farm, the road went straight on, then dipped abruptly, made a bend, and descended to the valley of Rouvrenoir. On the left, orchards interspersed with clumps of trees covered the steep incline. In the background a few ruins, whose thatch had the warm brown tone of old velvet, were sheltered by thickly planted woods. On the

opposite slope of the valley, woods again were mingled with cultivated land, finally merging into a high wall of forest which barred the horizon.

The house was built at the turn of the road, against a group of chestnut-trees and oaks. First of all there was a stile in a wall. Close to this wall were three lime-trees in a row. The wall itself disappeared in an oblique line, following the slope of the road. On one side of the courtyard a little flight of stone steps ended in a narrow garden laid out in terraces: on the other side, at the entrance to the wood, a three-hundred-year-old chestnut-tree reared its gnarled trunk and its enormous branches, which had been clipped so that the roof of the old house might be ensconced in the very midst of the foliage. Long, low, with its shutters closed behind a network of vines, the house seemed to be sleeping with its face to the sun.

The interior of the dwelling was very dilapidated; there were discoloured tiles, and projecting beams from which hung festoons of spiders' webs. Madame Lassaugette asked the price of the property, made a wry face, and declared that she would have to spend unheard-of sums on repairs.

'Oh, aunt, I implore you,' said the young woman, 'don't start renovating everything. I shall manage very well with those tiles and joists, and the good old-fashioned windows. Everything here looks so solid, simple, and peaceful. This house has a soul, which new houses have not. There is sympathy between me and it, aunt. I feel it welcomes me.'

'Well, well! Yours are the ideas of an artist. As for myself, I am nothing if not practical, and

when I am transacting business, I don't admit sentiment. So this ramshackle place pleases you?'

'Oh yes, aunt!'

Augustine was listening to the dialogue. He loved the humble dwelling—the 'Three Limes'—which had stood empty for five years, and which Madame de Chanteprie wanted to sell. An old gamekeeper and his wife had lived in it for a long time, and Augustine remembered having been taken there by Jacqueline, when he was quite a little boy. But now the old man and woman were dead, and when he crossed the stile, the remembrance of the good people touched him. Yes, as Madame Manolé had said so prettily and so feelingly, there was a soul in the ancient walls. If ever townsfolk with a weakness for the country came to stay there, they might take it into their heads to transform the old house into a Swiss chalet or a mediæval castle! Monsieur de Chanteprie had a vision of Gothic turrets, carved wooden balconies, and a dome-shaped conservatory in the middle of the lawn.

'Madame is quite right,' he said; 'repairs, if too thoroughly effected, would spoil the charm of the place.'

He thought to himself: 'Since it must be sold, I would rather sell it to this unknown lady who understands the spirit of old houses.' But Madame Lassauguette protested vehemently.

'So you are sentimental too, monsieur! But please observe that there is no stove in the kitchen!'

'It would be easy to put one in, madame.'

'At my expense!' said Madame Lassauguette. 'We shall see, monsieur; but first of all I must ask

a reduction of a thousand francs in the price of the property.'

'I will speak to my mother, and if she consents—perhaps——'

'There is no "perhaps." I will see your mother to-day; we will go to the lawyer's to-morrow, and, in four days, I shall be taking the steamer from Havre. So consider the matter well, monsieur. Which is the way to the kitchen-garden? Let's make haste.'

They followed a path through the little wood, and reached a rectangular kitchen-garden, enclosed by hedges. Whilst Madame Lassauguette was counting the fruit-trees, and making an estimate of the yield from wood-felling, and of the vegetables that might be counted on, taking the bad years with the good, Fanny raised her veil so as to get a better view of the magnificent landscape, both in its entirety and in detail.

'How lovely!' she said. 'What a surprise! How marvellous!'

Between the forked trunks and flowering branches of the apple-trees could be seen a vast expanse of meadows, sloping grandly onwards. The wooded sides of the hills, sweeping on to right and left, descended in one harmonious movement, as if to join forces. Isolated trees uprose here and there. Roofs emerged. One had a glimpse of the church at Rouvrenoir amid the seething mass of foliage, which early spring invested with the purple of autumn. And further on, bathed in the sweet transparent air, was the plain, stretching for miles and miles to the extreme horizon; the plain, with its

patches of woodland, its wide green reaches, (which rested the shadows of clouds, its dun-coloured tracts which the plough had traversed, its scattered villages, its steeples pointing skywards, its poplars planted alongside the roads; the plain, infinite under the infinite sky—that illimitable space which holds one spellbound, the dizzy azure in which the free winds of Heaven play, and which intoxicates the birds with joy.

Fanny, dumb with pleasure, held the folds of her veil against the brim of her hat, with one hand. She did not see, or appeared not to see, Monsieur de Chanteprie looking at her. She was a lovely woman, very dark, with masses of wavy hair—hair glossy as satin—clustering in ringlets on her temples. There was something Italian in the contour of her cheeks, in the shape of her straight eyebrows, her delicately chiselled nose, and her mouth shaped like a Cupid's bow. Yes, she recalled those ambiguous figures, half-angel, half-bacchante, who hold a crozier as if it were a thyrsus, and smile mysteriously out of the smoke-darkened depths of old pictures.

'One ought to be good in a place like this,' she said.

And her long-lashed eyes, with their velvety pupils, her beautiful eyes with their tender and questioning expression, encountered the eyes of Augustine.

He thought he perceived a mocking suggestion in her look and words, and turned away, stiff and constrained. For Augustine de Chanteprie, at twenty-three, was burdened with that vain touchiness of youth which leads its possessors to believe that :

women regard them with a mocking, malicious attention.

'Well, monsieur,' said Madame de Lassauguette, 'I will see your mother this afternoon. Could your farmer give us lunch? We are very tired, my niece and I, and I am not strong enough to walk three miles on an empty stomach.'

'I am lunching myself at Testard's,' said Augustine. 'Will you share the omelette and salad which the good woman has prepared? Then we will go to Hautfort.'

'With pleasure,' said the old lady. 'We can talk over our business during the meal, and we shall end by coming to an understanding, if you are reasonable.'

Augustine was not a bargain-driver. He was so 'reasonable' that Madame Lassauguette was delighted.

After lunch the carriage took all three to Hautfort. On the way the aunt chattered, the niece dreamed, and Monsieur de Chanteprie, seated between the two women, began to feel some alarm at the engagements to which he had pledged himself. Perplexed and uneasy, his shyness returned, and he drew as far as possible from his neighbours, his elbows pressed to his sides, his head thrown back, and his eyes fixed on the horse.

Fanny had lowered her veil. Beneath her velvet toque, and under the cream tulle, her beautiful eyes shone with a soft lustre. Where did this woman come from? Was she married? She must be, for she was called 'Madame,' and wore a wedding-ring

on her left hand. Why had she not referred to her husband? Her speech and manners betrayed a good education, but they savoured somehow of freedom, and suggested easy-going ways which are not usually associated with women anxious to be 'respectable,' and not attract attention.

'She is a foreigner, probably an Italian, and an artist,' thought the young man. 'Perhaps a young widow, poor, and with children to support, whom a kindly relative wishes to shelter for the summer at Chêne-Pourpre.' But she had not spoken of her children!

The smooth, level road skirted fields which displayed every shade of green, the fresh green of young wheat, the bluish green of young rye, the more sombre green of the meadows. Along the side of the road, yellow cuckoo-plants blossomed, and clusters of short-stemmed, scentless, pale-tinted violets could be espied.

'Do you know Old Hautfort?' Augustine asked Madame Lassauguette.

No; she had come by Gariguières, on the advice of a friend who had told her of Rouvrenoir as a picturesque part of the country, where property was not dear. Then Monsieur de Chanteprie began to praise his birthplace. He invited the ladies to visit the ruins, the church, and the churchyard. But Madame Lassauguette had no taste for antiquities.

'You can go for a walk through Hautfort, Fanny, while I see Madame de Chanteprie.'

They arrived at their destination. Augustine pointed out to the younger woman the road to the church, and followed Madame Lassauguette into

the house. A moment later he came out to find Madame Manolé seated on a stone bench in the shade of the lime-trees.

'I was afraid of losing myself in the town,' she said, laughing. 'I didn't stir! I so enjoyed looking at the country!'

'Well, I will put you in the right road. I happen to be going to the Church Square to a friend's house.'

He stood in front of her bareheaded; his hair was fair in the sunlight, of a dull, ashen-gold fairness. His high forehead was childlike in its purity. And how cold were his eyes!

Fanny murmured:

'This is lovely, as lovely as at Chêne-Pourpre. But there one sees only nature, the fields, the forest, and the sky; one can forget that men exist. Here, in spite of oneself, one thinks of the men of a past generation, of those who built those towers, who frequented those dismal dwellings and deserted streets. Oh! how long the days must have seemed to them, and how slow their life!'

'They were happy people,' said Augustine. 'They scarcely ever travelled; many of them died without having seen Paris or Versailles. They read little; Holy Writ and Plutarch sometimes composed their whole library. But they had no curiosity about the unknown. Their life was well ordered, monotonous, and harmless. Faithful to their king and their religion, respecting their traditions and customs, these good, obscure people, gentlefolk and citizens, were the strength and salvation of France. I envy them.'

‘You envy them, monsieur? Come now! I am quite sure you are oftener in Paris than at Hautfort.’

‘Don’t be too sure, madame. You might be deceived.’

He broke off the conversation abruptly, vexed at having betrayed somewhat of his inner self, and both descended in silence the steep road to the Bordier Gate. When they entered the church, Monsieur de Chanteprie offered holy water to the young woman! Taken aback, she touched the young man’s hand and made a vague gesture, whilst he made the sign of the Cross and inclined himself reverently before the high altar.

‘Good-morning, madame.’

‘Good-morning, monsieur.’

He turned to go, but before crossing the threshold of the church he cast a furtive glance behind him: Madame Manolé was not kneeling, she was wandering round as if she were in a museum, looking at the stained-glass windows and ornaments. A Protestant, no doubt; she did not even know how to make the sign of the Cross.

Madame Lassaugnette found Fanny seated again on the stone bench.

‘Back already? Well, it’s settled. We will go to the lawyer’s to-morrow. Are you pleased?’

‘Very pleased, and very grateful.’

‘You will be quite in your own house, and I, at the other end of the world, shall know that at last you have a refuge, whatever happens. Don’t thank me. I owed you that much, my poor child, and when I remember your father—— Do you know, Madame de Chanteprie raised all sorts of difficulties

at first. She said that her son had pledged himself without thinking; that he could not have seriously promised me such unheard-of concessions. Ah, that mother! A sallow, withered, cold, terrible woman! And such a house! Large, damp, badly lighted rooms where portraits stare at you out of the gloom. I am sorry for that young man who has to live there.'

'Don't pity him! I believe he is very happy.'

'Did he tell you so? Have you gained his confidence already? What a young hypocrite, to go out on purpose to talk to you!'

'Don't laugh, aunt. Monsieur de Chanteprie accompanied me to the church, and when he presented me with holy water I didn't know what to say or do. So then he left me abruptly. I don't think Monsieur de Chanteprie and I will be very good friends.'

'Bah!' said Madame Lassaugette, 'what does that matter? You don't want his friendship. Shall I tell you my opinion of that young man? Well, he is just a provincial fool, a priest-ridden reactionary! Yes, priest-ridden! Holy water indeed! Does he think we are in the Middle Ages?'

VII

'THAT old lady is gone,' said Madame Angélique to her son. 'I thought her demands exorbitant, but you had promised, so I had to give way.'

'Indeed,' replied Augustine, 'I have been scolding myself since this morning for having looked after your interests so badly. I was out of sorts to-day, tired, preoccupied, and dreadfully stupid. And, besides, that Madame Lassauguette worried me so.'

'Did you go and excuse me to Mademoiselle Courdimanche?'

'Yes; I told her that you were not equal to going out this evening. You will have plenty of time to see the Loiseliers and their daughter, if—if I make up my mind.'

'We know no one; we live like hermits: so if you really want to get married we must take advantage of the kindness of our friends who have found a bride for you. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Courdimanche say that the Abbé Chavançon, their cousin and an intimate friend of the Loiseliers, has a high regard for the family.'

'If I want to get married!' cried Augustine. 'One would think I had begged Mademoiselle Courdimanche to bestow a wife on me. For the last fortnight she has talked of nothing but the virtues, the talents, and the charms of Mademoiselle

Loiselier. And the captain, the Abbé Le Tourneur, Monsieur Chavançon, and you yourself, my dear mother—everybody has dinned into my ears: “Get married! Get married!” It is perfectly wearisome.’

‘Oh, my child, what are you saying! That I am urging you to get married? I am indeed not an enemy to marriage, though I know the great trials inseparable from that condition. But you have no vocation for the priesthood, and the Church looks with displeasure on celibacy among the laity. So you must think about getting married.’

‘That is Monsieur Forgerus’s opinion. He writes me a letter of advice and congratulation, as if I were already engaged. Look!’

‘He held out the letter to his mother. Madame de Chanteprie read, half aloud:

‘I have spent much time in prayer, before writing to you, my dear child. The advice you ask can only come to you from God; but I would like to prepare you to listen to this advice by enlightening your perception.

‘I do not think you would hope for marriage in the way your patron saint, Augustine, hoped for it, before he became a saint, when he aspired only “to satisfy that passion which is never satisfied,” and when he was “not so much in love with marriage as a slave to carnal desires.” It seems to me your feelings are rather those of Alypius, that Alypius who was quite content to be celibate, and did not want to marry, so that he might live with his friends in the love of wisdom. Nor do I think you would seek in marriage a means and occasion of increasing your worldly wealth. I know, my dear friend, I

know that your youthful manhood has fulfilled the promises of your childhood, and that you are chaste, faithful, happy in your condition, and devoted to your duty. Why, then, am I uneasy, just now, when your heart shows an inclination which is quite conformable to the will of God?

‘Still, I *am* uneasy, and I pray: I pray for you in fear and trembling, and I ask God on your behalf those gifts of discernment and strength which are so necessary to you, just as you are embarking on a new state.

‘I ask the gift of discernment. You are ignorant of women, my dear son. The few women you meet are, by reason of age, virtue, or parenthood, held in veneration by you. There is a mother in whom you admire a second Monica; a friend who preserves in old age the innocent purity of a child; a peasant woman, your servant, her body withered by toil, her mind unspoiled, her conscience dim. Love them, respect them—but fear woman. Eve, whether innocent or corrupt, is ever present with us, and we must struggle against her. It is an eternal fight, which old men cannot recall without a shudder. In marriage, as in unlawful love, woman is the enemy of man, and the saint who sins seven times a day, sins six out of the seven on her account.

‘Do not deceive yourself, my child, as to the nature and the issue of this mysterious struggle of which I speak. It is not merely a question of the conflict between passion and duty, between flesh and spirit. By a special providence you have known nothing of those carnal temptations to which nearly all young men of your age give way. Temptation

did not approach you who never sought it. Do not pride yourself on a virtue which is not your own, since it was bestowed on you by God. Neither brutal vice nor false love—a thousand times the more dangerous of the two—has gathered the first-fruits of your youth. Thank God, who in His love has thus preserved you!

‘And now woman enters into your life, in the gentle and encouraging guise of a Christian young girl. Ought you to trust entirely to this outward appearance of goodness, virtue, and gentleness, which may enchant you even more than fleeting beauty? And should you not beware of being ensnared by beauty even? Take care, my child, lest the charms of your *fiancée* should lead you to an excess of affection which would be prejudicial to you both, by depriving marriage of its proper character; take care not to love a fellow creature as much as your God, nor to love her at all excepting in God. You must dread those tricks of feminine tenderness, the jealousy, the entreaties, which, under colour of conjugal affection, incite men to an idolatry no less criminal than that of the heathen. Do not place upon the inmost altar of your soul a sinful being like yourself—a fellow-mortal. Love your wife, and worship none but God. Man is the head of the woman. Authority belongs to him, an authority regulated by justice and tempered by affection. You must govern your wife, my dear Augustine, keep her in the path of duty, preserve her from temptation, and protect her against her own weakness. You are responsible for her salvation, since you are her head, and she has only to

obey and follow you. But how can you govern her, if you cannot govern yourself? How lead her, if you yourself stray? How rebuke her, if you yield to her caprices, tears, and caresses? She will be virtuous and submissive, you say. Alas! she will always be a woman, and her beauty, her virtue even, her weakness above all, will invest her with mysterious weapons whose power you will experience.

‘That is why I ask God to give you the gifts of perception and of strength. I earnestly beseech Him to bless your marriage, so that it may increase your spiritual welfare no less than your material happiness. Keep passion, as well as selfishness, at a distance. And if you find in your wife a faith that wavers, or that has not been well taught, then, oh! my son, strengthen her, enlighten her, by word, by example, by hourly watchfulness! Conquer her soul with holy fervour: triumph over her to secure her salvation, lead her to the goal of eternal life, by the ways of eternal truth. Teach her, teach the world, what a Christian’s love can do.’

‘Wise and admirable words, which you would do well to ponder,’ said Madame de Chanteprie. ‘If your choice had fallen upon a worldly, dissipated person, who was not sincerely attached to our holy religion, I should oppose your marriage with all my might. But since they speak so well of these Loiseliers——’

Augustine began to laugh.

‘But, my dear mother, where could I find a “worldly, dissipated person”? She would have to come and look for me here! And that’s

not very likely to happen! Mademoiselle Cariste and her cousin Chavançon are very anxious to marry off Mademoiselle Loiselier. They thought I should be willing to make, like Racine, one of those marriages in which interest and passion have no part—a marriage of reason and wisdom. Besides, you know that even if Mademoiselle Loiselier were both rich and dazzlingly beautiful, I would not marry without your approval and blessing.'

'You are a good son,' said Madame Angélique. 'If Monsieur Forgerus heard you, he would be satisfied with you.'

The odour of pastry filled the Courdimanches' house. One could hear the frizzling sound of frying, the rattle of china and glass. When the cook who had been hired for the occasion opened the dining-room door, a large table could be seen, adorned with lighted candlesticks and pyramids of fruit and moss, and covered with a stiff, well-ironed cloth.

In the drawing-room the green repp-covered chairs, decorated with crochet antimacassars, were primly marshalled. The bronze of the clock shone like a star, between two bouquets of artificial roses. And the company were politely boring each other in this small, rather dark, damp room, which reminded one equally of a cellar and a sacristy.

The company consisted of Monsieur and Mademoiselle Courdimanche; the Abbé Le Tourneur; the Abbé Chavançon, curate of a large parish in Paris; the Abbé Vitalis, curate of Rouvrenoir; Monsieur

Loiselier, a manufacturer of images, and a member of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul; Madame Loiselier, president of the 'Association of Christian mothers' of her district; and Mademoiselle Eulalie Loiselier, their daughter.

They had come to Hautfort, invited by Cariste Courdimanche, who knew them only slightly, and introduced by the Abbé Chavançon, who knew them well. The abbé, a sociable man, good-humoured and prepossessing, was the adviser of the Loiselier ladies, who had constituted him their indispensable counsellor, the oracle of their house. He exercised this species of control over several families, at whose table a place was regularly laid for him on one particular day of the week, and in whose circle they neither bought a piece of furniture, nor opened a book, nor married a daughter, without first consulting the abbé. The abbé found favour in the eyes of the ladies because he was indulgent, witty, and a man of the world; he pleased their husbands because he loved a *bon mot*, and made one forget his cassock, which he himself sometimes found rather in the way. Too jolly to be a hypocrite, too healthy and gay to be vicious, Chavançon, like Monsieur Le Tourneur, was a clerical functionary worth neither more nor less than other functionaries. He did his work well, drew his salary, and lived in harmony with himself and with his neighbours. Every summer he set out for a long holiday, delighted to exchange his cloth for lay garments: then he went to the theatre and concerts, as pleased with his escapade as a woman of the world who is doing something risky. And he was so little like a

priest, in words and mien, that he was everywhere taken for an actor.

Such incorrigible light-heartedness, such frank good-humour had charmed the Loiseliers. Monsieur Loiselier was one of those men who are never mentioned, whom one hardly sees—a colourless, shy man of fifty, who always agreed with everybody. His thin blood scarcely tinged his shaven cheeks, and with his scanty and sad-coloured hair and his sallow skin, he looked thoroughly washed-out and insignificant. He trembled before his wife, a masterful woman, who ruled the household. Tall, strong, with a sort of vulgar beauty, Madame Loiselier wore rich dresses, chain bracelets of gold on her wrists, and hats with plumes. She loved money, and was tenacious of her reputation. Pitiless towards servants who ‘fell,’ she struck terror into the hearts of the employés, when she walked through the shop, amid the painted Christs and the silver-gilt monstrosities.

Seated on the sofa, this imposing personage was listening to the captain’s conversation, yawning the while, and thinking that the promised son-in-law was in no hurry to arrive. Waxing impatient, she began to reprove ‘Filleto,’ who was neglecting to hold herself up—a tiresome oversight, for Eulalie Loiselier was endowed by Nature with a hollow chest and a round back. ‘Filleto,’ the living image of her father, anæmic and pallid, her skin of a neutral tint, which almost matched her dress, poor ‘Filleto’ reminded one of an unfortunate little blade of grass which has been trodden on. She drew herself up with docility, stretching on her flat

bosom the draperies of her bodice and the bands of ribbon which were supposed to 'set her off.'

'Come, cousin,' said the Abbé Chavançon, 'has your young friend gone wandering about the woods, and forgotten the time?'

'Augustine is not wandering about the woods. He is at Hautfort, and I saw him only to-day. He was very busy, conducting negotiations with two ladies—Parisians—who are going to buy the "Three Limes."'

The Abbé Chavançon turned towards a tall, badly dressed priest, with a lined, determined face, and brown, straight hair.

'Parishioners for you, Vitalis.'

'If they are like my other parishioners I shall still have plenty of time for gardening!' said the serious-faced priest.

'Yes; Rouvrenoir is a restful sort of curacy. A fine country for sport!'

'Spoiled by poachers. There are pheasants still, but the hares are fast disappearing, and partridges are getting scarce.'

'And the stipend is nothing wonderful, is it?'

'No; wretched. But my needs are few, and my mother is very economical!'

'Ah, you have your mother with you! that is very convenient. Servants are so troublesome! The best of them go and bury themselves in Paris.'

'Don't say anything bad of Paris,' said the Abbé Le Tourneur, sighing at the magic word.

'Paris has its advantages—independence, congenial friends——'

'A large stipend——'

‘A large stipend—yes—but the work is hard in our large parishes. And besides, religious feeling is lost sight of. How many people, in the faubourgs, are married and buried with the civil ceremony only, from motives of economy!’

‘Yes,’ said Monsieur Le Tourneur. ‘What an age this is!’

The servant announced:

‘Monsieur de Chanteprie.’

The captain jumped up, seized Augustine by the arm, and introduced him to the Loiselier ladies. Then he whispered:

‘Give the young lady your arm.’

They passed into the dining-room. The Abbé Chavançon immediately started giving an account of his last holiday, by way of breaking the ice. Monsieur de Chanteprie, seated between Madame and Mademoiselle Loiselier, glanced timidly at his neighbours.

The mother was not much to his taste. Too strong and buxom, with plump cheeks, square teeth, eyes the colour of old gold, and hair that was curled on her low forehead, she reminded him somehow of an ogress. She was a fine human animal, well fed, and hung with multi-coloured stuffs, stones, and metals. And beside her her daughter looked like a mere outline of a woman, whom the selfish mother had created with a minimum of flesh and blood, and never finished.

‘I hear you are interested in farming?’

Monsieur de Chanteprie supposed he was to undergo a kind of examination, and, resigning himself to it, answered:

‘I occupy myself with farming both from taste and from necessity. Our little fortune is nearly all in lands which we let to tenant-farmers. I am obliged to look after these good people a little, since they are too fond of routine, and do not appreciate the beauties of agriculture. My interference does not always meet with their approval, and Testard does not hesitate to send me back to my books.’

‘You live at Old Hautfort all the year round?’

‘The whole year.’

‘Do you never travel?’

‘Never.’

‘But you must get horribly bored, for at your age a man wants to see life.’

Madame Loiselier expected a half gallant, half sentimental reply, an allusion to the sorrows of solitude, and the expected raptures of love.

‘That is exactly what a lady, a Parisian, said to me to-day. And when I told her I was perfectly happy in my niche, she looked at me with an air of pity.’

‘The lady from Chêne-Pourpre? The one who is going to buy the “Three Limes”?’

Augustine exclaimed quickly:

‘You know her? A very dark, slight, pale young woman, with large eyes—is she not an Italian?’

‘I don’t know her at all. These gentlemen were speaking of her.’

‘Do they know her, then?’

‘Not that I know of,’ said Madame Loiselier, somewhat piqued. ‘But in small towns like this, a young man cannot speak to a lady without all his neighbours hearing of it.’

'I don't see much of my neighbours, madame.'

'You are a barbarian.'

'Very nearly. I sometimes let a whole week pass without reading a newspaper.'

'Don't boast of that, my friend!' cried the Abbé Le Tourneur across the table. 'It is a sin, a great sin, to sit at the edge of the arena as a looker-on, while the soldiers of God are fighting. Madame, you must scold this young man. He must be persuaded to take an active part in life.'

The piercing voice of the Abbé Chavançon drowned the conversation :

'I said to the curate: "My being the youngest vicar is no reason why all the drudgery should be put upon me."''

The captain carved the roast turkey. The Abbé Vitalis listened to Mademoiselle Courdimanche, who was bewailing the high price of butter and her servant's iniquity. Monsieur Loiselier was demonstrating that France was going to the dogs. 'Fillette' cast shy glances at the young man, and Madame Loiselier, bending towards Augustine, said in a low voice :

'Yes, indeed, you should take an active part in life. What are you waiting for? an auspicious moment? It will come, sooner or later. Do you doubt your own ability?'

'I am not ambitious.'

'Because you have no confidence in yourself. You need to be reassured and encouraged. Look at celebrated men: they all depend on somebody's affection.'

Monsieur de Chanteprie froze. The lady seemed

to be speaking on her own account. Did she forget the melancholy Eulalie, and the marriage scheme? Was she offering herself as a mother-in-law, or as Egeria? Her ogress's eyes were actually growing tender.

So, without neglecting to reply to Madame Loiselier, Augustine turned more often to Mademoiselle Eulalie. He tried to make her talk, but 'Fillette' only replied by monosyllables. And Monsieur de Chanteprie, looking at her more attentively, noticed the girl's ear, a large, flat ear, exposed by the hair which grew too high—an anæmic, stupid ear.

Now, however, Madame Loiselier was playing conscientiously her *rôle* of noble mother. She spoke of her life in Paris, a life filled with earthly duties and good works. She quoted the names of priests, bishops, and professional philanthropists. Ah! 'Fillette' had been well brought up amid such surroundings! Monsieur de Chanteprie listened without understanding, his nerves quivering, his whole being possessed by the thought of that flat, pale ear, from which he was powerless to avert his eyes. And suddenly he saw again Fanny Manolé's profile under her veil, and her delicate, pink little ear, half-hidden by the folds of the tulle and the wavy masses of her black hair.

And the young man's thoughts wandered far indeed from the Loiseliers and Courdimanches, to the fresh trees, the blossoming meadows, the roads bordered with violets, and the immense blue-grey horizon. He recalled, word for word, all that Madame Manolé had said. How well she could speak of Nature, the woods, and the sky! How

well she understood the rustic charm of the old house!

Monsieur Le Tourneur said grace. Augustine, awakened from his dream, conducted 'Fillette' to the drawing-room.

'My dear Abbé,' whispered Madame Loiselier to Monsieur Chavançon, 'you did not tell me that Monsieur de Chanteprie intended to lead the life of a hermit!'

'Nonsense! when he is married he will come out of his shell.'

'If he ever *is* married! Monsieur Loiselier will not want to give "Fillette" to such a barbarian. Why, the young boor thinks to honour us by the alliance!'

'Monsieur Loiselier will do as you wish. But, my dear friend, was not "the young boor" attentive to you and "Fillette," then?'

'He talked to me about agriculture, drainage, the rotation of crops, and phosphates.'

Mademoiselle Cariste poured out the coffee. The Abbé Chavançon began to describe the pinchbeck articles provided for his use at the vicarage where he lived. Then he asked permission to light a cigarette.

'What, Victor, you smoke?' cried the captain.

'Cousin,' replied the abbé, 'don't be scandalised; a cigarette is lawful indoors. Does the snuff-box seem to you more canonical—the traditional snuff-box attributed to the village curate, and inseparable from a checked handkerchief?'

This reply made every one laugh, and Chavançon continued:

I'd bet five shillings our friend Vitalis has a pipe in the pocket of his cassock, a large clay pipe which he patiently colours in the hours of leisure the Rouvrenoir people allow their pastor.'

'Don't bet, you would win!' replied Vitalis, displaying a short pipe, which he immediately returned to his pocket. 'This pipe, an old friend, does not offend the eyes of my flock; quite the other way. So long as my zeal was at its most ardent pitch—I am speaking of past days, when I first became acquainted with Rouvrenoir—I should have blushed to lead the same life as others, and I ingenuously affected the airs of a reformer. I kept people at a distance so as not to lower my own dignity, and they, thinking me conceited, amused themselves at my expense. Nowadays I have lost this youthful ardour and my illusions; I ask little, and receive still less, and my parishioners, delighted at being "tormented" no longer, as they say, live on very good terms with me. A curate who presses cider, and clips trees, and whom they come across in the morning, setting snares for small birds, a curate who preaches very short sermons and does not attack the government, they respect and like. And it no longer occurs to any one to imitate a peacock's strut behind my back.'

'Well, my friend,' said the Abbé Le Tourneur, 'I knew well enough your ardent passion for proselytising would not last. But you go to extremes. You let the town council take the very shirt off your back.'

At the stroke of ten the Loiselier family said good-night. Their adieus were curt and cold.

Whilst the Courdimanches were accompanying their guests to the coach, Augustine and Vitalis walked up the Bordier street together.

'Well?' said the priest, with affectionate raillery, 'will there be an engagement between Mademoiselle Eulalie Loiselier and Monsieur Augustine de Chanteprie?'

The young man laughed.

'You didn't notice the mother-in-law, then? She could hardly conceal her spite against poor, innocent Mademoiselle Cariste. They are furious at having come so far to see a savage—a country lout.'

'By George, you were not brilliant to-night! You seemed to be thinking of anything but getting engaged.'

'My dear friend, the Loiseliers may perhaps be better and more intelligent than they seem, but they and I have nothing in common: neither tastes, ideas, nor habits. They bored me: I seemed very stupid to them.'

'And the girl?'

'She scarcely spoke; I hardly saw her. She does not exist for me. All the same, I feel happy, gay, released! I breathe! I feel as if I had just escaped a great danger!'

'Take care,' said the Abbé. 'Take care, in escaping from Charybdis, not to fall into Scylla. There are plenty of Loiselier girls in the world. Here we are at your door; go and relieve your mother's anxiety. Good-night, my friend.'

'Good-night.'

VIII

AUGUSTINE perceived Madame Manolé standing against the lattice gate in the full glare of the sun. She was looking down the road, and seemed to be expecting some one.

‘Monsieur de Chanteprie! Have you just come from Hautfort?’

‘Yes, madame; I am going to Roches.’

‘You have not seen a bicyclist in distress?’

‘No, madame.’

‘It’s extraordinary!’

She laughed—a clear, childish, treble laugh.

‘I can see Barral, wandering about bewildered, trying to find his way, and pushing his machine. Monsieur Barral is a friend,’ she explained; ‘I am expecting him to lunch, or rather, I won’t expect him any longer.’

‘He may have missed his train.’

‘Possibly; but since you are here, Monsieur de Chanteprie, I should like you to go over this house you are so fond of. You will see I have not vulgarised it. Mother Testard is always saying: “The lady from Paris is like the master; she loves old things!”’

She opened the gate. Augustine entered the courtyard, which had been cleaned, sanded, and made presentable.

'I am in my morning frock. Don't look at me. In Paris I would not venture to show myself in this *négligé*, but here I am frankly rustic.'

With one hand she raised from the ground her long robe of maize-coloured China silk, a full and soft-flowing robe guiltless of girdle, whose folds clung to her supple figure. A wide-brimmed hat of rustic straw, crowned with poppies, was worn rather low on the nape of her neck, and her black hair looked blacker still under the crown of scarlet flowers. The young man, accustomed to the scanty gowns and antiquated hats of the pious, was lost in wonder at this simple yet striking costume.

Since Madame Manolé had come to live at the 'Three Limes' he had met her somewhere in the country almost every day. She was usually painting, seated on a camp stool before a little easel, and her parasol, stuck in the ground, cast a shady circle around her. Engrossed in her work, she raised and lowered her long lashes without moving her head, and her beautiful fingers, handling the coloured chalks, left on the paper a powder finer than that of the butterflies—a powder which expressed the moods and emotions of leaves and sky. When she saw Monsieur de Chanteprie, she would greet him with a smile. Sometimes he ventured to draw near.

They entered the dim, fresh-smelling dining-room, which contained a massive table, an ancient kneading trough, and a walnut chest. The window had curtains patterned in red and white squares, and the hangings of the walls, of a warm and soft-toned red, harmonised with the brown wood of the beams.

'How charming!' said Augustine.

'Now I only want some copper and earthenware vessels here and there. They tell me I can get some at Martin's, at Gariguières. I love old things. My father had a very fine collection of pottery, which had to be sold after his death. When I was little he used to take me with him to Breton and Norman hamlets, and we made wonderful discoveries. Poor father! He was so bright and gay! He was like his pictures! You know his "Cupid's Revels" at the Luxembourg?'

'I have never been to the Luxembourg—only to the Louvre, once——'

'Once!'

'Only once.'

'Then what have you been doing all your life?' she asked, with an accent of pity which made Augustine smile.

'I know what you are thinking, madame. My ignorance seems so incredible to you that you can hardly make up your mind whether I am a "gentleman" or a peasant.'

'If it were a hundred years ago, I should reply: 'Neither a peasant nor a gentleman, but a country squire.'

'Be it so!' said Augustine, who appreciated the delicacy of this reply; 'a country squire, a little more educated than Testard, but scarcely more civilised.'

She listened to him with so much good-humour that he suddenly lost his shyness, and began to talk as he would have talked to a man of his own age. He briefly related the story of his family, his education, his monotonous and obscure life. Madame Manolé smiled no longer.

‘I can understand,’ she said, ‘how you have become what you are—a fervent Catholic. But you are very different from all other Catholics—from those at least whom I have met.’

And suddenly, impelled to confidence, she continued:

‘As for me, I was brought up by my father in the midst of an artistic and literary circle. They discussed all kinds of ideas before me. Celebrated men petted me and took me on their knees when I was a dreamy, light-hearted child. What queer paradoxes, what strange and profound conversations I listened to sometimes! Ah! the glorious days of long ago, the glorious hopes, the glorious dreams! I can see my father seated before his canvas in the costume he loved—the red blouse of the Slav peasants. His grey hair curled above his forehead; his blue eyes shone; his deep voice made the windows rattle. Dear father! what a vigorous, happy nature was his—yes, happy—made to receive and bestow happiness!’

‘You lost him?’

‘Too soon. I was only fifteen. Our old friend, Madame Lassauguette, took me home with her, and married me to Pierre Manolé, a musician. I have been a widow four years.’

‘God has tried you sorely, madame.’

She sighed.

‘I had a little child—he too——’

Her eyelids fell. Monsieur de Chanteprie, touched by her emotion, reproached himself for having nothing to say. Fanny, a widow, afflicted and unhappy, had no terror for him: he would have

liked to express his sympathy, but an embarrassment he could not overcome closed his lips. He felt stupid and foolish.

The young woman shook her head, as if to dispel a memory.

'In that world where I lived, and which you do not know, there were certainly several so-called Catholics. I was thinking of them just now, when I was listening to you, and I could not help drawing comparisons. Yes, there were artists who called themselves "mystics"; they were Knights of the Graal, brethren of the swan and the holy rood. My father laughed at them. There were also men who were Catholics by convention and tradition, but who lived as utter heathens, I assure you. My father despised them.'

'I despise that sort of men, too,' said Augustine. 'But how can people who hold the faith live in such a world, and if they do not hold the faith, why call themselves Christians?'

'Do you believe that men of the world can preserve their faith intact?'

'It is difficult, but God keeps those whom He has chosen.'

He was thinking: 'Do you hold the faith yourself, madame?' The fearful question burned his lips.

'I am astonished,' he continued, 'that the evidence of the truth does not convince the minds of men—I mean earnest men, who are seeking the right path in fear and trembling. And I am still more astonished that any one can know the doctrine of the Church without admiring it, admire it without loving it, love it without practising it.'

‘There are rebellious minds——’

‘There are above all unenlightened minds; their misfortune is due to their ignorance. One day perchance a word comes to them like a ray of light, a flash of lightning: they are illuminated; they understand.’

Seated on a rush chair, her elbow on her knee and her chin on her hand, Fanny was gazing into space. Augustine thought she was going to reply, that she would pronounce the decisive word. Why did he await this word with an anxiety he had never known before? He had forgotten the trivial reason for his visit, the beginning of the conversation, his shy timidity, and his mistrust. How had they come to speak of God? Augustine could not tell. The utterance of His name compelled them both to reveal the secret depths of their souls. For they were now but two souls in presence of each other—either friends or enemies. No, Fanny Manolé could not be irretrievably an enemy! She had suffered, she had loved and wept. She was a Christian by instinct. Augustine could not bring himself to doubt it.

Slowly, steadily, the clock struck the hour—twelve. Augustine took his leave.

‘I am expected to lunch with the curate of Rouvrenoir,’ he said. ‘You will forgive me, madame, for having kept you so long?’

They rose, once more on terms of ceremony.

A bicycle bell sounded in the courtyard, and a man appeared, wheeling his machine, the nickel plating of which glistened in the sun. Fanny exclaimed:

'You, George! Where have you come from? I had given you up.'

The cyclist replied:

'My dear friend, I throw myself on your mercy. But do please let me have a glass of beer. I am exhausted.'

Fanny introduced the two men.

'Monsieur de Chanteprie, Monsieur George Barral. Oh, George, this is too bad of you!'

'You shall scold me directly, when I have quenched my thirst.'

Augustine regarded the new comer with interest. He was handsome, with the good looks of an athlete, but without the conventional charm which is termed 'distinction.' The muscles of his legs stretched the knitted ribs of his black stockings; his feet, encased in tan leather, trod the earth firmly. One could imagine the width of his chest and the prominence of his pectoral muscles under his open jacket and loose shirt. The sunburnt neck, large mouth, sound teeth, trim-cut brown beard, and the nose with its well-developed nostrils, all seemed to betoken a kind of animal strength and gay sensuality. The thick, short hair grew above a wide forehead of noble contour, a forehead denoting energy and intelligence, and there was good-natured raillery in the glance of his clear grey eyes.

After a few polite words had been exchanged, Augustine departed, bearing in his memory the double picture of Barral and Fanny Manolé, standing side by side. Whilst he was following the road to Rouvrenoir, Barral was asking:

'Who is that young man?'

'He is the son of the owner of this place, the mysterious old lady whom my aunt told you about.'

'Do you often see him?'

'No. He is rather shy, and I think he is afraid of women. He came in to-day quite by chance.'

'Poor devil!'

'Why do you pity him?'

'Now that he has come once he will come again. I know you, Fanny, you fascinating little witch!'

'You are very silly, George!'

'You are getting bored already, Fanny. Does it amuse you to enslave that village hobbledehoy?'

'Village hobbledehoy!' Be polite, my dear fellow. You don't know whom you are talking about.'

'What does this Monsieur de Chanteprie do?'

'He reads St. Augustine.'

'Impossible!'

'I assure you he does.'

'Oh, madame, you choose your admirers very ill!'

'And you choose your jokes very ill, George. I scarcely know the young man. Let us go in.'

Barral leaned his bicycle against the trunk of a lime-tree, and followed the young woman. When they had made the tour of the place Fanny begged her guest to wait for her under the chestnut-tree, where she had placed a little table and two rustic chairs.

'My servant, who comes two hours a day, prepared lunch under my direction, but I must put the finishing touches to it,' she said. 'Allow me to put on an apron.'

'Fanny, I am shocked. Why doesn't your servant stay all day?'

'Because — but this is uninteresting, stupid domestic business, which doesn't concern you. Here are some books and papers. Have patience.'

Alone in the little glade, under the shadow of the chestnut-tree, Barral did not touch the papers. He was dreaming.

George Barral was thirty-five. He was rich enough for work to be a pleasure to him. Now and then he wrote smart, satirical essays, which he did not set much store by. The art of writing interested him less than the art of living. Barral knew how to live. He practised what he called a superior egotism. None of those humble joys which the fastidious pretended to despise did he think worthy of neglect. He praised, with impartial eloquence, good cheer, lovely women, and fine books. He saw the best side of even the most vulgar things, and enjoyed with infinite gusto the hundred and one little daily pleasures which made up the sum of his happiness.

Fools called him a 'materialist.' Barral knew the varied meanings of the word, and laughed at it. They said, too, that he was living a life of debauchery, having abandoned his wife and child, and this story, bandied about from one to another, had distressed Fanny Manolé herself. Barral, in order to clear himself, had had to tell her the truth. When in his first youth he had married a very young girl, who had been brought up in the provinces, and was pious even to fanaticism—the very type of the 'young person.' They had separated of their own free will. Madame Barral, delighted at recovering her liberty without dispute

or legal formality, had returned with her daughter to the little town of her girlhood, and dispensed in charity the income her husband allowed her. Three or four times a year George went to see his wife in friendly fashion. She received him well. In the intervals between these visits they wrote to each other regularly, and the wife said prayers for the conversion of her heathen husband. Neither of them wished for a divorce, she by reason of her religious scruples, and he out of sheer indifference.

What would be the good of a divorce? George had no intention of marrying again. He did not despair of meeting a free, intelligent, unprejudiced woman who would consent to become his friend and mistress. Provided she did not insist on his taking his matrimonial affairs into court, and going through the marriage ceremony a second time, George felt sure he could secure to her a substantial and solid happiness—the right kind of happiness. But he had to find the woman.

Barral was dreaming of these things. Fanny appeared, with her sleeves rolled up to the elbow, carrying a pile of plates which she arranged on the little table. In five minutes the meal was ready.

‘You are hungry, poor George!’ said Fanny. ‘I have not an abundant lunch to offer you. Look, I have put everything on the tablecloth. My servant has gone. We will wait on ourselves.’

‘But why have you no servant?’

‘It is only for the moment that I am without.’

‘Oh, if only I had known! It was very stupid of me to invite myself. Forgive me.’

‘Don’t apologise. I am delighted to see you.’

My friend, art sells badly. I have neither genius nor opportunity. That is why my aunt Lassauguette wanted to secure a roof to shelter my head in bad times—a roof which could not be taken from me, a roof which would defy creditors!’

She laughed. They were seated face to face, and Barral exclaimed:

‘I admire your cheerfulness and pluck! But I am distressed—yes, distressed, to see you reduced to the necessity of housework—you, a delicate woman, an artist.’

‘Indeed I would rather order my dinner of a major-domo. You needn’t think that housekeeping amuses me! But I had plenty of experience in my husband’s time.’

‘Pierre Manolé was a wastrel!’

‘Yes, indeed. He devoured my little dowry in less than three years. Of course he didn’t devour it alone. He had assistance.’

‘I cannot understand how you could bring yourself to forgive him when he came back after that episode.’

She murmured:

‘He was not responsible, you know. He was the son of an inebriate, and had early run the gamut of all pleasures, natural and artificial. He had wit without reason, genius without talent, and feeling without goodness. At times simple and coaxing as a child, he would suddenly become gloomy, restless, and taciturn. He had abominable fancies. You can have no idea, Barral!’

‘I know.’

‘No—no one can know. But why should I talk

of the poor man? I could no longer love him, but I could not forget that I *had* loved him.'

'You are a good woman.'

'So they say. So much the better. But they also say evil things about me.'

'What do they say?'

'Scandalous things. I am alone; I have neither husband, father, nor brother to defend me: so the evil-disposed don't mind what they say. They say, for example, that I am "a woman of love!"'

Barral knew the 'scandalous things' she referred to, utter absurdities as they were. He had met Fanny three years before at Madame Lassauguette's, and before he had got to know her well, he had heard people—and such people!—express the most varied opinions about her.

Everybody knew the story of Madame Manolé, the natural daughter of Jean Corvis and an Italian model, who had married a half-crazy composer, who, after ruining and abandoning her, had returned to die in her arms. Friends and comrades praised the young woman's goodness, courage, and generosity; they even praised her beauty and talent. And their praises, tactless as they often were, provoked systematic disparagement on the part of those fools who were jealous of her. Fanny Manolé had talent? She had been brought up in a good school, forsooth, in the midst of students and models. Had she not herself posed half naked, and perhaps absolutely nude, before that father who was so fond of her? She was pretty? Was not that a very good thing for her, seeing that she had no fortune and badly needed practical sympathy? She was good

and devoted? Well, she certainly knew how to attract men. And finally, could she not be defined, summed up, in a single phrase, which expressed all these insinuations, criticisms, and insulting tributes of admiration? She was 'a woman of love.'

Barral had heard the expression a hundred times, and repeated it in his thoughts as the rarest and most delicious praise which could be given a woman. What did rumours matter? He did not want to know whether, during her widowhood, or even in her married life, Fanny had remained 'virtuous'; he attached no unnecessary importance to this detail: Fanny was mistress of herself, until she became his—Barral's—mistress. And why should she not be his? Were they not wonderfully suited, made for one another, both having suffered enough in marriage to understand the charm of free love and despise conventions? Barral loved Fanny neither romantically nor sentimentally. He was not a love-sick student. He did not shed torrents of tears, thinking of the beloved one; he did not dedicate sonnets to her; he was quite incapable of going to seek flowers for her on the summit of Mont Blanc. And even if Fanny would not love him, if she loved another man, Barral was certain not to die of despair. But he valued the probity of her character; he loved her keen and flexible intelligence as a source of rare and lasting pleasure; he desired her slender, vigorous, and supple body.

- 'Intellectual sympathy, an exchange of delicate feelings and joyous sensations—that is love,' thought Barral. 'There is nothing sublime in it, but it is very sweet and very pleasant. Why will

not women accept this simple definition of a very simple thing? They want drama, heroics, all the stage business of love. It is childish. Not one of them, not a single one, is willing to descend from the empyrean. Not one! And I am not sure that Fanny——'

He began to laugh aloud, shaking his head. Fanny was taken aback.

'What is the matter?'

'I was thinking,' he said, 'that the same set of fools associate us in the same reprobation, and I am delighted at it. You are "a woman of love," and I am an unnatural father, a cruel husband, a libertine. The spite of fools, and the foolishness of the malicious draw us near to each other. But tell me, my dear friend, candidly, why do you so dislike being called "a woman of love"?''

'What an absurd question!'

'Not at all! Consider now.'

'A woman of love!—why, it means a loose woman.'

'Oh no! it merely means a woman who loves love, a woman who is made for love. And, be it said without offence to you, dear, you represent exactly that type of woman, physically and morally.'

Fanny became scarlet.

'Is that a compliment or an insult, George?'

'Neither, my friend; it is a statement. And, to my mind, it is a eulogy. You are a being made for love, and you inspire love. Don't be surprised, therefore, that people seek around you for the object of your love, real or imaginary. I, who am your best and most faithful friend, have often wondered how you can endure your unnatural

and cruel solitude — cruel, indeed — and I have thought——’

‘That I loved some one?’

‘Yes.’

Her head drooped, and he saw nothing but her hands clasped to her temples, and the mass of her black hair.

‘You won’t answer me?’

‘How can I?’

His heart beat furiously. And, across the little table, he longed to seize Fanny’s hands, to draw them away and uncover her face. He yearned passionately to conquer her, loosen her hair, know the touch of her lips and her tender skin. And the warmth of the embrace he dreamt of went to his head. He was intoxicated.

But Fanny rose abruptly.

‘Enough of this idle talk,’ she said; ‘the time is passing. Shall we go for a bicycle ride? I will go and dress.’

Disconcerted, he replied:

‘Yes, madame.’

She entered the house. Barral swore:

‘What a clumsy fool I am! I have offended her. She did not understand me.’

He had come with some dim idea of speaking to her, questioning her, risking the supreme test. But it was difficult. How could he say to her bluntly: ‘My dear friend, I am rich, and you are poor. I can travel for pleasure, and you have to earn your living. It is unjust, revolting. So, since I love you in my own way, since I want you, I offer you security, comfort, some degree of luxury, and my

sincere affection, to compensate you for the scorn of fools. But I cannot marry you !'

Barral could see now that Fanny would probably consider such a declaration in the light of an insult. Free as she was from prejudices, she could not easily relinquish the approval of the world—that world which makes no distinction between the woman who loves unconventionally and the female libertine.

'I must be patient. I must pave the way for persuading her, make suggestions and allusions. But, hang it all ! I am not cut out for that sort of thing.'

She returned, looking charming in a short black skirt, black silk stockings, low-heeled shoes, white muslin blouse, and a large white straw hat. She was no longer Fanny Manolé ; she was an uncertain sort of being, with a younger and more provoking charm. Barral exclaimed :

'You look just seventeen !'

'Thank you, uncle !' she said, laughing.

They set out, side by side, on the road to Chêne-Pourpre, accompanied by the gentle breezes of the afternoon, and by the humming of the four wheels, which flew along with a buzzing like that of bees. With the same rhythmic movement their feet pressed the pedals, and they proceeded with ever-increasing ease and velocity.

Around them stretched the plain, with its crops of bluish rye and silvery oats, and wheat on the point of turning yellow ; further on were spaces of moorland covered with heather, and yet further, a sombre, dense circle—the forest. The sun was

high in the heavens. The steel of the bicycles cast dazzling shafts of light, and the pair spun along in silence, and without apparent effort.

They descended the sloping lane which buried itself in the depths of the forest; they passed on their left preserves and rabbit-warrens, and, on their right, the pretentious façade of an aggressively new Louis XVI. mansion, lawns dotted with trees, lakes, and pheasant coverts. They mounted an incline to the plain again, skimmed along the road between fields, and left behind them the last thatched roofs of a village. And they were once more in the forest.

‘Let us rest!’ cried Fanny.

She alighted briskly. Barral joined her, and, leading their machines, they penetrated into the wood.

They were in an avenue of the forest, very narrow, and so long that they could not see the end of it. Oaks with enormous twisted roots, as tenacious as claws, put forth a vigorous foliage of solid green. There were twin beeches with glossy trunks which looked like entwined hamadryads, and here and there, amidst the tangle of undergrowth, uprose white-barked birch-trees, crowned with pallid foliage. A damp, pungent odour arose from the bracken, and the mossy banks of olive and emerald were sprinkled with mushrooms.

George and Fanny seated themselves on the gnarled roots of an oak. In front of them the overturned bicycles looked like dead things, disjointed and pitiful.

Barral took the young woman’s hand.

'Listen to me attentively, my dear friend, and don't answer until you quite understand me. I want to ask your advice—advice which must be very clear and perfectly sincere, because I shall follow it resolutely.'

'George!'

'Listen to me!' he continued. 'It is a very simple matter. You know how I am situated, Fanny. I am married. I have promised my wife not to seek a divorce; it would be legally impossible. Besides, I have not the least inclination to do so. I consider myself free—I am free. Don't you think so? Speak, Fanny!'

'I do.'

'Well, Fanny dear, here I am—free, thirty-five years of age, young enough to enjoy my liberty for a long while yet, old enough to value it at its worth, sensible enough not to abuse it. I have mapped out for myself, at little cost, and without wrong or injury to any one, the kind of existence which I consider the pleasantest and best. I work, not from necessity, not even from vanity, but for pleasure. If it pleases me to travel, I strap my bag and go; if it suits me to live alone for a time, I shut my doors against intruders. If I want to work off my energy, I quit my books, revert to the happy animal of primitive times, and become a hunter, fisherman, and swimmer, passionately absorbed in all the violent delights of sport. Having a good digestion, my temper is good. Having a good temper, I am an optimist, lenient in my judgments. I have friends. And I should be the most fortunate of men if——'

‘If what?’

‘If I could find a woman, a true woman, for my own. Do you understand?’

‘That’s not difficult to find, George. There are lots of women!’

‘My poor friend! If you only knew! “Lots of women!” Not one in a hundred, not one in a thousand! There is nothing so rare as a true woman, my dear Fanny. On one side there are the “regulars,” the army of conventional women—wives, *fiancées*, mothers, and sisters. On the other are the rebels, the “deserters,” and—those who trade in love. My situation debars me from the “regulars”: young girls bore me, and as to married women, they are more or less like my own wife, and that is enough to put me off. So we won’t talk of the “regulars.” What is left to me?’

‘The others—those “who trade in love.”’

‘Well, there certainly are women of a certain class who would give me what I ask, but I should only ask them for what they can give; and that is not much. And, candidly, it is not enough for me. For, if I am not sentimental, neither am I——’

‘The brute of primitive times?’

‘I am a man, Fanny, and I seek a woman—not an anæmic and fanciful doll, who would break if I touched her; not an unthinking, voluptuous animal; but a woman, a young, beautiful, healthy being, with blood in her veins and her lips; who would not be afraid of my touch, but who would give herself freely, without humbug; an intelligent, refined, tender being, always somewhat elusive, and yet simple and sincere.’

'You don't want much!' said Fanny, disturbed by Barral's look, an insistent, penetrating look, more eloquent than words, and bolder than a caress.

'The woman I speak of exists, Fanny.'

'Really? Is she what you call a "regular," or a "trader in love," or a—"deserter"?'

'If she consents to love me, she will pass into the ranks of the deserters. And it is at this point that I am relying on your opinion, Fanny. This woman, whose wit, grace, and pluck I admire, this woman who exactly realises my ideal of a friend and a mistress—this woman I cannot marry. I would share everything with her; I would ensure her a safe and happy life, I would cherish and protect her, I would defend her against the scorn of the world—but she would have to despise that scorn, break with foolish prejudices, foolish shame, and foolish deference to public opinion, and be mine, bravely, blithely, before the whole world.'

Fanny withdrew her hand. She seemed wrapped in thought, her whole face hard, almost hostile. Barral took off his hat and wiped his forehead, which was covered with beads of perspiration. And as Fanny turned suddenly towards him, her look met his with a defiant expression.

Madame Manolé got up, raised her bicycle, and standing over Barral, as she rested against the handle-bars, she replied :

'My dear friend, when a man loves a woman, he gives up everything to marry her.'

George turned pale.

'It is sometimes impossible, and always useless. And besides, I can answer you in my turn. When

a woman loves a man she follows him, gives herself to him, unconditionally, without bargaining.'

She repeated sarcastically :

'When she loves him !'

'Fanny !'

'Well, let him make himself loved, if he can !'
she cried.

She laughed nervously, provokingly, as if spurring Barral on. And, jumping on her bicycle, she was off.

Through the long green avenue, under the leafy, sky-flecked vault, now plunging into the shade, now emerging into the light, like a black, white-breasted swallow, the woman fled. She flew as if on wings, cleaving the air which blew with exhilarating effect over her determined face, her panting bosom, her swiftly-moving limbs. She was bathed in moisture, and she fled, knowing neither wherefore nor whither, but carried away by that dim instinct—the primitive fear of man, united to the delight, the pride, and the terror of being pursued.

And, behind her, he gave chase. Surprised at first, then annoyed, finally charmed, he now revelled in this hunting down of love, which awoke the savage instinct in him. The play of his muscles, the even rhythm of his breathing, the warm blood in his temples, were a physical delight which caused his masculine heart to swell with pleasure. Sure of victory, he rejoiced in his superior strength, pressing the pedals steadily and regularly, without unnecessary haste. But Fanny from afar felt his approach. She heard the bell tinkle in response to the bumping of the wheel, and, redoubling her speed, she made

all the haste of which she was capable. Barral gave vent to a muttered exclamation. He ceased to think of himself as the primitive human being pursuing the female of his kind through the forests of the dark ages. All capacity for thought forsook him, and he felt arise in him an unknown spirit—the fierce spirit of a falcon. He passionately longed for his beautiful prey. With a hoarse, indrawn breath, his teeth clenched, his veins swollen, he flew like an arrow, and descended the steep lane. A sign-post marked the road as dangerous; no matter! Down the slope, towards the possible abyss, the woman and the man, the swallow and the falcon, disappeared and reappeared, pursuing and pursued. A peasant who was gathering wood stood up, waved his arms, and opened his mouth with a cry they did not hear. The cottages of a hamlet uprose in the depths of a gloomy thicket of trees. Frightened fowls scudded away. The cries of children could be heard. Then followed solitude, the pungent, resinous odour and the red-brown colonnades of the pines. And gradually the woman became exhausted. The distance between the two diminished little by little. The man was gaining on her with the rapidity of lightning. Fanny felt him nearer—nearer yet. The bell sounded, the wheels vibrated. A rapacious hand clutched her shoulder. The two runaway bicycles revolved slowly side by side, then stopped. Barral jumped off his.

She had come to the end of her strength. She alighted, with embarrassment, and a look at once submissive and defiant. George leaned the machines against the trunks of the pines. He smiled:

‘Come here and rest.’

‘No.’

‘You shall. By right of conquest!’

He took Fanny’s arm and made her sit on a bank in the heather, and for a moment they were silent. The young woman, panting, every muscle aching, looked fixedly in front of her at the immense bluish expanse of forest, the background of ultramarine on which stood out the symmetrical shafts of the pines, their branches reddened by the setting sun, their foliage of an intense green. Woodpeckers cheeped as they struck their tiny, monotonous blows at the trees. A pheasant rose, brushing the undergrowth in his clumsy flight. The tender sky was flecked with silvery clouds, light as thistledown.

George’s arm was round Fanny’s waist. She yielded somewhat to the support of his stalwart shoulder. Weary as she was, her mouth trembling and her eyes rebellious, she yet tasted the strange sweetness of her defeat. Though hostile still, she no longer thought of escape.

She looked at Barral with that sidelong glance peculiar to women, the glance which slips from between their lashes, coming and going almost imperceptibly. She understood, she had always understood, that George wanted her, but she thought him incapable of loving—of loving as she herself could love, and as she wanted to be loved. He had so often said that he was selfish, material, cynical! She had come to believe it, not yet having passed the age when sentimental illusions and romantic fables are the necessary adjuncts of love. Her deplorable experience of marriage had not enlight-

ened her. She was so young yet, at twenty-six! It was neither prejudice nor fear of the world which restrained her now. It was rather a feeling of disappointment, an involuntary bitterness against this man who could not and would not take the conventional attitude of the lover. Besides, he was too calm, too proud of his strength, too happy. She was not necessary to him. Fanny dreamed of a sadder, tenderer, more submissive lover, whom she would console in his utter despair, whom she would reconcile to life, and whose adoration of her would be unbounded.

Fanny was jealously keeping herself for this expected lover, who was to be so different from the harsh and capricious husband she had known, and from the flirtatious, mock-tender friends of her widowhood. Why did George interfere between them? Barral represented love in all its nakedness, shorn of what he mockingly called its 'stage business'—that love which does not kindle the imagination, but which holds its own as a force of nature, and which appeals to the senses.

Unknown to herself, Fanny was experiencing its power. She defied George's desire with anger, yet it pleased her. She defended her heart, resolved not to love George, but to love that other, the one who should possess her wholly and give himself wholly. The repugnance which Barral showed for a divorce and second marriage strengthened Fanny's bitterness. Truly she held marriage in little account, but she hated reservations. She thought Barral insulting, coarse, cynically selfish! And yet she trembled, seated so near him on the heather, her

nerves unstrung, her eyes grown wistful, her hands burning.

‘Let us go on!’

‘Where?’

‘To Chêne-Pourpre.’

‘I will leave you then at the cross-roads. I must take the six o’clock train.’

‘Very well.’

They arose, very calm and polite, a lady and gentleman once more.

‘Shall we start?’

‘Yes.’

She went towards the bicycles, raising her arms to adjust her hat-pin. Suddenly Barral clasped her, drew her to him, crushing the muslin blouse, seeking the lips which were refused him. She uttered an indignant ‘Oh!’ His kisses rained down on her hair, her cheeks, and her obstinate, tight-shut lips.

‘I love you. You will love me. You shall love me!’

He repeated ‘You shall!’ with a childish persistence which made Fanny laugh heartily the next day. But, furious at his violence, she did not laugh now. She struggled—the little black and white swallow seized in the falcon’s claws.

‘Let me go! I am very angry!’

He obeyed. She arranged her blouse over the shoulders which his rough caresses had bruised. The lace collar, torn in the struggle, was hanging pitifully. Barral saw this detail, and it overcame him. He realised that he had been foolish and clumsy.

‘I am a brute, Fanny; I beg your pardon. I am so sorry, Fanny! I will never do it again—never!’

He was so abashed and penitent that the young woman laughed.

'You look just like a naughty boy who has torn his mamma's dress! You are so absurd that I can't be angry! But don't do it again.'

They set off, at a moderate pace, side by side. They passed through the village, mounted the hill and the avenue, and found themselves once more at the edge of the forest, on the tableland. Barral murmured :

'Fanny, you are not angry?'

'I have forgiven you! I am generous.'

'And you understood?'

She nodded. She had understood for a long while.

'Well?'

'Well—I don't know—I can't say yet. I must have time to reflect, and to know my own mind.'

'I am going to Germany next week. I am going with another man to visit the castles of the king of Bavaria. A pleasant holiday—which we will take together some day, won't we?'

She did not answer.

'Shall we write to each other, Fanny?'

'Certainly, if you like. Good-bye, and a pleasant journey to you, my friend, for here is your road.'

'Good-bye, my dear, dear friend.'

He held out his hand in passing; she extended hers. The pressure was a rapid one. Barral pursued his way to Hautfort.

And Fanny, watching him depart, sighed, thinking deeply.

IX

ONE afternoon in May, Fanny, lying on a couch in her room with its flowered hangings, was reading a letter from Barral. Suddenly she heard the click of the gate. Some one was coming into the courtyard.

She thought :

‘It is Monsieur de Chanteprie.’

During the last few days he had often come to the ‘Three Limes’; his visits, which had become longer as well as more frequent, appealed to the young woman’s coquetry. She thought him naïve, shy, and altogether charming.

She quickly fastened the collar of her gown, and entered the dining-room. Monsieur de Chanteprie was standing waiting in the doorway; a priest was with him—a very tall priest, with an appearance of great strength, looking black against the sun, his crisp hair standing out round his head like an aureole.

‘Good afternoon, madame. May I introduce my best friend, the curate of Rouvrenoir, who has come to pay you his pastoral visit?’

Fanny looked at Vitalis.

‘Why, I know him very well already. We met one morning, a week or two ago, in the wood.’

‘Yes,’ said the abbé, ‘I had established myself on the outskirts of the wood, with my lime-twigs. I

must have looked like a wizard. Suddenly I heard an exclamation, and, looking up, perceived Madame Manolé.'

'Oh, you gave me a nice fright!' said Fanny.

She laughed, delighted. A priest who loved sport, a priest whom one met in the early morning on the heather, a priest who was so little a priest in appearance, manner, or tone of voice—was he not an amusing, unexpected type, for whom she might have a fellow-feeling?

'You are fond of sport, Monsieur Vitalis?'

'Alas, I am, madame. It is an hereditary passion with me—a guilty and unfortunate passion. I am the son of a poacher, and somewhat of a poacher myself, and when I hear the rustle of a pheasant, or the note of a soaring lark, all my predatory instincts awake. I am a hunter of birds and a hunter of souls.'

Madame Manolé invited the two men to sit down. The abbé looked curiously at the furniture, the studies hung on the wall, and the mistress of the house herself. He was fain to confess that he was not an artist himself: painting and sculpture did not interest him, but he adored music.

'I used to play the harmonium at the seminary, but now I have become more of a peasant than the peasants themselves.'

'You are fond of nature. My neighbour Vittelot told me so, and in his estimation it was no mean praise.'

The abbé declared that Vittelot was not mistaken. Yes, he was fond of nature; he loved hard work, long walks, that regular and healthy life which

makes men really men. And, talking of peasants, he compared the peasants of Balzac, George Sand, and Zola, with the real peasants he had known all his life. It was apparent that he had somehow or other managed to read a good many unprofitable books, and had collected a little store of scientific and literary ideas, which were a source both of pride and of inconvenience to him. Fanny became interested in the conversation. The abbé found he could talk to her, and was pleased. His large, tawny, dog-like eyes lighted up with secret joy. He liked well enough to pass for a rustic, but not for a fool.

The talk drifted into another channel. The abbé talked politics without religious bias—with the air of an onlooker; then he passed abruptly from politics to the subject of morals, and from morals to religion. And Fanny candidly confessed her ignorance.

‘You don’t practise your religion? Oh, I am scarcely surprised. Too many women of your age have forsaken the Church, and it is a noble and fruitful task to convince them and bring them back to the fold.’

‘But I have not forsaken the Church.’

‘Really?’

‘I mean—May I speak to you freely?’

‘Certainly. I am not a Torquemada!’

‘I never received any religious instruction. I live in happy ignorance.’

‘Happy!’ cried Augustine.

She turned to him.

‘Are you astonished?’

‘Yes—and grieved.’

He coloured. Fanny looked at him, and an idea which she immediately dismissed as absurd and impossible vaguely disturbed her mind. Monsieur de Chanteprie seemed strangely moved.

The curate sighed :

‘Yes—it’s very sad ; but the goodness and mercy of God teach us to be tolerant. But, madame, you are not, properly speaking, an enemy of religion?’

‘Neither an enemy nor a friend. I am indifferent.’

‘You have been confirmed?’

‘No.’

‘But you were baptized?’

‘I was baptized, but that proves nothing,’ she replied ingenuously.

‘That proves nothing?’ said Augustine. ‘Then you cannot know what baptism is?’

Fanny gave him a bewildered look. No, she did not know. She was baptized : a priest had sprinkled holy water on her forehead when she was a baby, and said a few Latin words. And that meant that she was a Christian, like everybody else.

‘Like everybody else ! Truly, you cannot know !’ said Monsieur de Chanteprie. ‘It’s not your fault. But that you should be happy—that an intelligent being can be happy, without knowing and loving God, is impossible ; such happiness can only be a delusion.’

The abbé coughed : Augustine was going too fast ; the lady might be offended at his interference. But Fanny, like one in a dream, her long lashes fluttering on the pale amber of her cheeks, turned slowly, bravely, to the young man.

‘Do you pity me?’ she said.

He replied :

'Yes, madame, I pity you. You are too sensitive to all that is beautiful to remain in indifference if you only knew and appreciated the divine beauty of religion. So much consolation is denied you! So many emotions are unknown to you! How is it that you do not suffer at feeling around you that mystery, that fearful mystery which human science cannot pierce? How can you be happy while ignorant of whence you come, whither you go, and what you are—liable also to suffer at any time in your health, mind, interests, affections? Ah, madame, there are such things as misfortune and death, there is the terrible "afterwards" of death! And you—suspended over the abyss, in darkness, with no other light but the feeble one of a vacillating reason—you dare affirm that you are happy, and you are surprised at me,—a Christian,—because I pity you with my whole heart, and am infinitely grieved for you.'

Fanny raised her head, and the sad gentleness of her eyes was like a caress, as she lifted them to Augustine's face.

She murmured :

'You are right—I am not happy.'

He opened his lips, but could not speak, and they looked at each other as if a veil had fallen, as if they saw each other for the first time. How strangely docile and gentle she was, with her drooping eyelids, her heavy waves of black hair falling over her temples, her pretty mouth somewhat contracted like that of a child who is going to cry! Augustine understood all that she did not say, all that her silence and her attitude expressed. A passionately tender pity, a desire to be gentle and kind, swelled

his heart. And he almost cursed the presence of the curate, whom he had brought against his will to see Fanny, to make an experiment which was nothing to Vitalis himself.

'Never mind,' said the abbé cheerfully; 'a wandering sheep is not necessarily a lost one. You will return to, or rather you will enter, the good road, my dear lady.'

He looked at the clock:

'Three o'clock! I must go. Vittelot is ill, and I must console him. It is a professional duty, though the sight of a black robe is no source of pleasure to him. These peasants are always afraid that I herald the grave-digger. Good day, madame. I am delighted to have made your acquaintance. You are not coming, my friend?'

'I will meet you presently at Vittelot's,' said Augustine.

Fanny accompanied the abbé to the gate. When she returned, Monsieur de Chanteprie was standing in front of the varnished wood shelves containing her library, which occupied a corner of the dining-room.

She approached noiselessly, and, when she was close to the young man, began to laugh:

'What are you looking at there?'

He started with surprise.

'Oh! I beg your pardon, madame.'

'You are interested, are you not, because you want to know what I read, think, and love! Oh! you are very inquisitive, Monsieur de Chanteprie!'

'Madame——'

'You are horrified at those books? Are they on the Index?'

‘Probably.’

He smiled. She continued :

‘You promised to lend me some books.’

Augustine pointed to a parcel on the table.

‘I have not forgotten my promise, and I have brought you two little volumes, which are very precious to me, but which you will perhaps think tiresome.’

‘Why?’

‘They would interest you a hundred times more if you knew a little theology, or at least something of the catechism. But——’

‘Is theology very difficult? You might explain it to me. But let me have a look at them first.’

She cut the string, unfolded the paper, and took up two volumes bound in brown calf, and printed on yellowish vellum. The first page bore in large red and black type, the title: ‘Memoirs of the History of Port-Royal, by M. Fontaine.’ And, under a diagram representing a bird’s-eye view of the monastery of Port-Royal, followed the inscription :

Cologne,
At the Company’s Charges
MDCCLXXXVIII.

Fanny looked at the marker of faded red silk, turned the leaves, and read aloud the headings of the pages: ‘Short account of the life of M. Fontaine’—‘Memoir of M. Le Maistre’—‘Religious duties of the Solitaries of Port-Royal des Champs’—‘Notes on the Schools’—‘Notes on the men of Port-Royal.’

‘This little book,’ said Augustine, ‘belonged to my ancestor Agnes, who was miraculously cured

of disease. My great-grandmother brought it from Utrecht with many others: the *Necrology*, *Frequent Communion*, and the celebrated *Augustinus*. If you have patience to read the good M. Fontaine, in spite of his long-windedness, his endless repetitions, and his awkward style, you will soon feel the austere charm of Port-Royal. And later on, when you are more familiar with its heroes, you will end by loving them.'

'But I can't read it! I shan't understand it a bit!' cried Fanny. 'Port-Royal! I have a vague idea about Port-Royal. It was a convent in the valley of Chevreuse, where a few learned men retired from the world, and spent their time in working and in teaching the young. There was a certain Lancelot, who forbade Racine to read a Greek romance which was too erotic for the worthy man's taste—a romance which was called—was called—'

'*Theagenus and Chariclea*.'

'That's it! And Racine learnt the forbidden book by heart, didn't he? Later on, he quarrelled with his old masters, on account of his tragedies. Then, after he had written *Phèdre*, he was reconciled with Port-Royal. That's as far as my knowledge goes: it does not amount to much. Oh yes! I know, too, that Louis XIV., at the instigation of the Jesuits, caused Port-Royal to be destroyed. But tell me, what harm did the Jansenists do?'

She was seated on the sofa, holding the ancient book half-open between her fingers, in the soft folds of her light gown. Her head stood out in relief against the background of dull red formed by the hangings, and her eyes wore a smiling, questioning look:

'Tell me.'

He yielded; and, trying to make his language clear and simple, as if he were speaking to a child, he described the winding valley and wooded slopes of Port-Royal, the abbey built in a swampy dale, the sougling of the wind in the poplars, the deeply rutted roads, along which heavy coaches, jolting and groaning on their axles, brought penitent princesses.

Fanny listened to Augustine. An unknown world opened out before her, a dim world peopled by the guilty and the penitent, lighted up by sudden manifestations of grace, and dominated by the Cross, that Cross of sorrow on which suffered a God whose blood was powerless to save the whole of mankind. She could not well understand the alarming doctrine, but the images evoked by Augustine soothed her mind. What mattered the *Augustinus*, and the 'five propositions,' and the 'semi-pelagian' errors, which Monsieur de Chanteprie was trying to explain to her? She saw the pale-toned poplars in the depths of the valley, the surroundings of the convent represented on the first page of the 'Memoirs' of Fontaine. Nuns in white robes, wearing a red cross over their hearts, slowly paced the cloisters. Le Maistre, in a grey habit, sawed wood in the courtyard. The young Racine, wandering amid the deserted woods, murmured the name of Chariclea. And coaches descended the steep, furrowed road. There came the fair Madame de Longueville, and the pious Duchesse de Luynes, and the faithful Mademoiselle de Vertus, and the capricious Madame de Sablé, and that Madame de Guéménéé, whose soul was like a bare roadway, open to all the winds, but in whom flickered a tiny

spark of grace. All sorts and conditions of men and women emerged from shadow, conjured forth by Augustine's words.

'Am I boring you?'

'Oh no! please go on.'

Augustine continued; he told of the persecution, of the dispersion of the nuns who refused to sign the 'formulary,' which condemned a book they had not read. He told of the supreme profanation of 1709, of buildings destroyed, tombs violated, the dead devoured by dogs; and, overflowing with emotion akin to that of a son relating the outrage done to his father, he grew excited, his face burned, his eyes flamed, his voice trembled, like the true Chanteprie he was.

'There are no more Jansenists now?'

'A Jansenist Church exists in Holland, and comprises the dioceses of Utrecht, Haarlem, and Deventer. The last of a few Jansenist nuns, sisters of St. Martha, died not long since at Magny-les-Hameaux, near the ruins hallowed by the memory of the two Angéliques. But the greater number of actual Jansenists are concerned less with the precepts of Saint Cyran than with their own fanatical follies. I prefer not to speak of them.'

'You are not a Jansenist yourself, then?'

'I?—I am a Catholic.'

'What does that mean?'

'It means that I submit to the teachings of the Church: I believe in free will, and I don't doubt that we may all work out our salvation, by the grace of God.'

'Grace?' repeated Fanny.

He tried to define grace, to explain its origin,

nature, and mysterious workings in the soul. The young woman tried to understand. But suddenly he hesitated, his scrupulous mind was seized with diffidence. What if this curiosity on Fanny's part, this desire for information, were the first movement of grace in her? How was he to guide and enlighten her, unworthy as he was? Should he speak of a priest? He dared not. And besides, Fanny was like Vittelot—easily scared by a black robe.

'I will do my best to make you understand,' said Augustine.

She thanked him. Her pretty hands were turning the leaves of the old book, impatient to make its acquaintance. Augustine abruptly bade her good-bye.

Waiting outside the house where the Abbé Vitalis was to meet him, he was possessed by a tender, delicious, peaceful feeling of joy—a joy compounded of hope, fear, pity, and a great bewilderment. And he stood as if in a trance, looking at the little yellow flowers growing beside the road.

'Well, have you gone to sleep?' said the mocking voice of the priest.

'I was dreaming a beautiful dream,' replied Augustine.

'Are you going to return to Hautfort on foot?'

'Yes, I shall enjoy walking. Will you come with me?'

'As far as the highroad.'

They went on side by side, greeted by the peasants whom they passed. The abbé began:

'My dear friend, you asked me to go with you to see that lady, so that I might manage to put her through a sort of little spiritual examination. Well

I extracted all I could from her. You know now that Madame Manolé is an utter heathen.'

'A heathen! Oh! you are severe!'

'She does not know a word of the catechism; she has not been confirmed.'

'She has been neglected; she has lived in a detestable world. How can she love the God whom she does not know? We must help her soul in its struggle towards the light.'

'I don't at all see that she is struggling,' objected the curate. 'Still if it pleases you——Oh! that lark! If only I had a gun!'

'Do not Christian charity and brotherly love impose it as a duty?' replied Augustine. 'Who can tell? A book, a word in season, may work in her soul, move her, and turn her insensibly to God.'

'Yes,' said the abbé, 'I understand:

*"Seigneur, de vos bontés il faut que je l'obtienne !
Elle a trop de vertus pour n'être pas chrétienne !"*

'Well, yes!' replied Augustine firmly. 'She has virtues which I know nothing of, but which my heart tells me intuitively are there. Laugh at me if you like, though it would be inconsiderate and rather rude of you. I don't know why it is so painful to me to think that Madame Manolé is not a Christian, but I confess I would do anything in the world to convert her.'

'I am not your confessor, Augustine, and I would not like to be. So that I can speak to you as a friend and comrade.'

'Of course.'

‘Do you want a word of advice, not from priest to layman, but from man to man?’

‘Yes.’

‘Convert Madame Manolé—or shun her!’

‘Why?’

‘Because—because you love her. Yes, you are in love with her. I can only warn you.’

‘What! Do you imagine I am in love with the woman?’

‘Imagine! I am sure of it! It is not a crime. She is a widow, and free. You can love her honourably, and marry her.’

Monsieur de Chanteprie did not answer. The abbé looked at him with an air of mocking pity.

‘I suppose,’ he said, ‘that marriage——’

‘I—love Madame Manolé! I! I!’ repeated Augustine. ‘What makes you fancy such a thing?’

‘My poor boy, your looks, your language, everything—even that uneasiness which possesses you, that anxiety to know whether this woman shares your beliefs and feelings—all betoken love.’

‘Love!’

‘Does the word frighten you? But is there not a chaste and noble love which has marriage for its end and which God blesses? Was not our Lord present at a wedding feast? You forget, my dear Augustine, that marriage is a sacrament.’

‘Marriage!’ Augustine shook his head. ‘Oh! I was not dreaming of such a thing. But perhaps you are right. Perhaps I have deceived myself as to the nature of the feeling which made her soul dear to me above all others. I never thought of her as “this woman,” but as “this soul.” For my affection, by whatever name you call it, is fixed more on

the soul than on the physical presence. Marry Madame Manolé! My only thought was to rescue her from the abyss into which she is plunged. The idea of her moral misery and of her forlorn condition is unendurable to me. But my solicitude on her account, for which I do not blush before God, is not love.'

'What is love, Augustine? You don't answer. Come, be quite sincere: why did you not marry Mademoiselle Loiselier?'

'Because she seemed too utterly different from ourselves—an alien—because——'

'Then you didn't trouble about her soul? The soul of Mademoiselle Loiselier, a simple, pure young girl, obedient to her parents, a Christian by education if not at heart, is less precious in your eyes than that of Madame Manolé, who is also an alien, different from you, an enemy to what you love, and a heathen besides.'

'Mademoiselle Loiselier has parents, her natural protectors. The other is alone, utterly alone.'

'You speak of Mademoiselle Loiselier's parents. What kind of protection or moral guidance can she expect from her stupid father and her vain, selfish mother? I am quite sure that Madame Manolé would be odious to you if you considered her dispassionately. She is the enemy of your God.'

'Not an enemy. Remember her words!'

'Our Lord said: "He that is not with Me is against Me."'

'I want to persuade and conquer her.'

'Only to diminish the distance which separates you from her. You never thought of conquering Mademoiselle Loiselier.'

'Oh, how you torment me!' cried the young man distractedly. 'I!—love Fanny Manolé! Why, I have just been with her—alone with her—and what do you suppose we talked about? Port-Royal! That's not a subject which lends itself to love-making.'

'There is no question of love-making!' said the abbé, shrugging his shoulders. 'To the woman you love best you talk about what interests you most. Come, my son.' And the abbé placed his rough hand on Augustine's shoulder. 'Understand me. I esteem and love you. I should be sorry to see you become a prey to an adventuress. So I believe I am doing my duty, not merely as a priest but as a friend, in helping you to recognise a love which is taking root and springing up in the very depths of your soul. It is a monster which must be dragged into the light, which must be faced, so that it can be kept in check or destroyed altogether.'

'Again, you may be right. But why the word "adventuress"? She is a widow, she has lost her child, and she is working hard for her living.'

'A widow! There are so many sham widows. You don't know the wiles of the creatures.'

'What creatures?'

'Women.'

'Madame Manolé is incapable——'

'How deeply you are in love already! Be prudent. Keep watch over the too generous and spontaneous impulses of your heart. Here is your road. Good-bye, my friend. Shall I see you again soon?'

'No doubt.'

'Good-bye. Remember me to your mother.'

The Abbé Vitalis went down a turning, and his

black form disappeared among the bushes. Augustine continued on his way.

The sun was getting low in the heavens when he descended the winding road which skirts the municipal garden of Old Hautfort. He crossed the little town and entered the church.

A ray of light, subdued by the upper windows, filtered between the pale-toned pillars, and the stained glass was becoming dim; indigos were turning violet, and purples were growing black in the shadowy vistas whence the light gradually withdrew. The step of an invisible visitor could be heard. And in this pallor, in the wan twilight, prayer became a familiar confidence, and emboldened by the sense of a living Presence, murmured its requests in the very ear of God.

Augustine was dreaming and praying. He tried to live the preceding days over again, to follow his love to its source; but his passion had no history. A young man, a fervent Christian, meets a beautiful and desirable young woman; he does not see her beauty, he does not desire her; it pains him to find her obstinately silent on one point, and by an innocent subterfuge he compels her to make an admission. Soon the salvation of this woman becomes dearer to him than his own life. He wants to bring her into the pale of the Church, to associate her with the communion of saints. And this ingenuous proselytism, this self-effacing solicitude, this self-forgetful longing for sacrifice is Love.

Love! The word, uttered before the altar, took on a mystic sense which had no terrors for Augustine. His inward strife died down. It was unlikely, impossible indeed, that this apparently disinterested

feeling should be an ingenious lie—a secret artifice of the devil—since prayer, instead of destroying, fortified it. Augustine recalled the terrible distress which the sight of Georgette's bare bosom had caused him, that physical depression which still afflicted him at times of temptation. The lessons of Forgerus had inspired him with fear and disgust towards the 'feminine animal.' But Fanny did not represent the 'feminine animal,' nor the seducer, nor even the wife. She was to him merely a soul to be saved.

The time passed on. The opaque stained glass was lost in the gloom of its leaden setting. One by one the figures that knelt here and there rose, slipped silently between the empty pews, and, after reverently bowing the knee, vanished into the darkness. Nothing animate was left save the little lamp whose ruby heart beat on unceasingly.

Without word or thought, Augustine prayed, letting his very soul melt and dissolve in supplication, like myrrh poured out on the pavement of the sanctuary, or incense exhaled in silence and in the shadow of night.

And the offering was altogether pure. Human love and divine love were mingled in a feeling of angelic joy. The earthly face of Fanny, transformed into something heavenly and unreal, was nothing but the shrine whence the Holy Spirit shone. Fascinated by the bliss of this illusion, Augustine seemed to clasp her in a mystic embrace through time and eternity. He offered himself as a willing victim for the salvation and welfare of the sinner; he yielded himself, he sacrificed himself, with trembling, happy haste, his whole being wrapped in a sweet, profound, unutterable sorrow.

X

WHEN Augustine returned to Chêne-Pourpre the weather had changed: a continual downpour bathed everything in watery mist. And Fanny's mood had changed like the weather. Shy and almost sad, she seemed anxious to keep her distance and to avoid all intimacy.

She had read the *Memoirs* of Fontaine. Monsieur de Chanteprie brought other books, and the reading of them provoked long discussions. Fanny, an artist rather than a philosopher, indifferent on the whole to general ideas, centred her interest on the anecdotes and portraits. The faces of the holy Fathers and Sisters stood out from the canvas with the particular characteristics with which her imagination endowed them, and gradually took colour, life, and movement amid the scanty setting supplied by the historian. Bent on putting together in her mind a sort of vast picture, after the manner of Philippe de Champaigne, Madame Manolé stopped short at the external realities of Jansenism. The spirit of Port-Royal interested her less than its private life and intimate history. All that related to doctrine, theory, dogma, and criticism of dogma seemed to her incomprehensible and unimportant.

After all, it was much that she should be interested in persons, thought Augustine, since, when seen

through the mist of centuries and reduced to their essential features, these persons were nothing but the embodiment of ideas. What were the two Angéliques, and Le Maistre, and De Saci, and the great Arnauld, if not austerity, firmness, learning—Jansenism? And what was Jansenism if not the effort of a few superior minds, mistaken though they might be, to restore in their integrity the dogma and morals of primitive Christianity? The particular history of these minds, the story of a convent of nuns and a little lay community might lead Fanny indirectly to Christianity itself, and bring her, surprised and reluctant, to face those problems which Christianity alone can solve.

Augustine, nourished on Pascal, thought he saw in Fanny that man described by the author of the *Pensées*, that man more indifferent than unbelieving, who, shut up in his cell, and not knowing whether sentence is passed on him, having only an hour in which to learn the fact and to obtain pardon, wastes that precious hour in a game of piquet. She did not maintain that the soul is only a breath of wind or smoke. She said: 'What do I know?' and 'What does it matter?' forgetting that 'all our actions and our thoughts must proceed on different lines, according to whether we aspire to eternal happiness or not, and that it is impossible to take a single step with sense and judgment unless we regulate it in view of that goal which ought to be our ultimate object.' Like Pascal, Monsieur de Chanteprie was distressed to see 'in the same heart and at the same time an extreme sensitiveness to trifling things, and a strange indifference to the most important ones.'

He recognised 'that incomprehensible stupor, that extraordinary lethargy, which is the work of a powerful and maleficent being.'

What should he do? Awake the slumbering soul, and gradually put it in the position of the person 'who having always lived in general ignorance and indifference respecting all things, and particularly with regard to himself, at last begins to inquire what he is. He can then no longer remain in indifference, if he has ever so little reason; and, however unmoved he may have been hitherto, once having realised what he is, he is bound to want to know also whence he comes and what is to be his ultimate fate.' But in vain would he seek enlightenment by the aid of natural intelligence; the last resource of reason is to recognise that there are a multitude of things which are beyond its ken, and that 'there is nothing so reasonable as a renunciation of reason.' Christians, when making known their belief to the world, declare it to be 'foolishness'—*stultitiam*. And those who, in addressing themselves to unbelievers, try to prove the existence of God by the works of Nature, the course of the moon and the planets, by physical, and even metaphysical, proofs 'give ground for belief that the proofs of religion are weak indeed.' Augustine avoided such talk. He knew that faith is not a gift of reason, but a gift from God, from that God who Himself says He is a 'Hidden God'—*Deus absconditus*. The will, rather than reason, is the source of faith, and no one *can* believe who does not *want* to believe.

The young man tried to move Fanny before con-

vincing her; he hoped to lead her to 'that belief which is a habit of thought, and which, without persuasion, art, or argument, leads us insensibly to the truth, so that our soul in the end inclines to it naturally.' Of course he did not doubt but that at first Madame Manolé, a true daughter of Montaigne, would incline towards the insidious path of doubt. But at all events it would not yield her the deadly mental repose which she seemed to enjoy. Fascinated by the dawn of Christian truth, she would at last experience a longing for God.

How Monsieur de Chanteprie regretted the absence of his tutor! Invested by age and knowledge with an almost sacerdotal authority, Monsieur Forgerus would have been able to govern and overcome Fanny's rebellious soul. Neither Monsieur Le Tourneur, nor Monsieur Chavançon, nor Monsieur Vitalis seemed suited to such a difficult task, and Madame Manolé would have regarded their intervention as an impertinence. She was still suspicious of the priesthood. Augustine alone could make himself heard.

It rained continually. On the tableland and in the misty valley groups of trees and houses emerged from the fog, grey upon grey. The grass grew rank under the apple-trees in the meadows. Frogs croaked at the edges of the pools, and now and then in the distance a peasant woman passed, her skirt pinned up and her head held down, grasping in both hands a blue cotton umbrella.

Fanny, a victim to headaches, received Augustine in her room. On the curtains of unbleached linen,

yellow tulips flourished amid a tracery of leaves. A plain paper of a tender green covered the walls, and on these pale yellows and dim greens, this milky whiteness of stuffs and hangings, the little lemon-coloured blinds shed a pale, still light, like the unvarying reflection of a winter sun.

Sometimes Monsieur de Chanteprie, expressing regret for his indiscretion, made as if to go away, but Fanny detained him easily enough. How charming she was, leaning on the cushions of her couch, a little lace fichu tied round her temples and under her delicate chin! They talked gently and seriously, and became so absorbed that he forgot the time and she forgot her headache.

Fanny experienced a mysterious pleasure in talking about and explaining herself. She was in every way the elder of the two, taught by life, by love, by sorrow, and sufficiently complex to disconcert an ignorant and simple young man. And, along with the satisfaction she experienced in revealing her soul bit by bit, naked and trembling with shame, there existed a sort of need to reassure Augustine, to indicate the points of contact between them. And this was not a trick to bind him to her, for Fanny simply could not play the coquette with Monsieur de Chanteprie. It was the effect of an overpowering instinct which made her reject conventional lies and reveal her whole true self as soon as she was confronted by a sympathy which was sincere. And the pleasure she took in this hasty, imprudent confidence, followed as it often was by bitter regret, was also Nature's

revenge for the compulsory hypocrisy imposed on women.

Augustine went away, moved with compassion and tenderness. He dined late, waited on by Jacquine, whom his long absences rendered uneasy. After dinner he generally went to see the Courdimanches. Monsieur Le Tourneur, the governor of the hospital, and the captain played dummy whist. Mademoiselle Cariste, buried in a cushioned arm-chair, questioned Augustine: 'We haven't seen you in the town lately. Where have you been? I met you the other day with the lady from the "Three Limes."' Augustine, warned by a lover's intuition, scented a possible danger in his old friend's innocent curiosity. He replied by evasive speeches, keeping close guard over his secret. No, he did not wish to say anything yet, not even to his mother whom he saw so little, not even to Monsieur Forgerus, not even to simple Mademoiselle Courdimanche. And yet he experienced a vague delight in speaking guardedly of the lady at the 'Three Limes.' 'Is she a right-thinking person?' asked Mademoiselle Cariste. 'She cannot think amiss,' replied Augustine, 'for she is full of wisdom and goodness.' Soon the old maid would nod her head and doze in her arm-chair. Augustine turned the leaves of the *Religious Weekly*, which was placed conspicuously on a shelf of the *escritoire*, and the rustling pages, the gestures of the players, the heavy breathing of the slumbering devotee, the globe of the lamp, the pious images affixed to the walls, the muslin window-blinds, the whole room with its combined flavour of mint, washing-day, and mouldiness,

all united to produce a deadly tedium—a tedium which Augustine experienced with something of shame.

He would return to the summer-house, open the window, and, leaning over the balustrade, look out into the black void broken here and there by flickering fires, its horizon punctuated by one motionless and glittering star. Strange—perhaps guilty—imaginings came to him. He thought of other young men of his age, consumed with the fever of ambition and love; he thought of those who burned the midnight oil, bent over their books; he thought of those who passionately clasped tender women in their arms. He was so awkward, so commonplace—ridiculous, no doubt, in Fanny's eyes! Would she ever love him? Overcome with melancholy, on the verge of tears, he sought distraction. He took from its shelf a book which he did not read, and, regardless of time, remained with empty hands and unseeing eyes before the dying lamp.

The last quiver of the wick made him start. He knelt for the evening prayer, and then it was that—free, untrammelled, before the very angels themselves—he spoke of her, for he could no longer pray for anything or any one but Her—for the beloved soul whom he designated with a thrill of joy by her earthly name of 'Fanny.'

When business kept him at Hautfort, or compelled him to make short journeys, he experienced an ill-suppressed impatience, and was subject to fits of depression which surprised Jacquine and his friends. Wherever he was, his longing to see Fanny,

to hear her speak, was a source of torment to Augustine; he bore about with him the piercing sensation of her memory, driven like a nail into his very heart.

Fanny, however, enjoyed the feeling of this dawning solicitude about her. She guessed the young man's intention, and his love-inspired proselytism was not displeasing to her.

She sometimes recalled Barral's cynical confession, the kiss in the forest; and his memory, thrust as it was into the background of her thoughts, became at last thoroughly unpleasant to her. George was travelling without her, amusing himself far away from her, and he dared to send her witty letters, altogether too gay in tone, in which he spoke of his love! Fanny replied to them out of politeness, but the correspondence interested her no longer. She wanted to forget the man who still insulted her by his desire, offering her his love for a term of a few seasons. All her thoughts went out to Monsieur de Chanteprie, to him who cherished without desiring her, with a tenderness which time could not destroy, and which extended even to the life beyond.

The life beyond! Fanny Manolé troubled herself very little about that. No metaphysical scruple spoiled for her the simple charm of existence. The hypotheses of philosophers interested her no more than did the assertions of believers. She had not been brought up in the hope of a problematical immortality, whose joys are purchased with pain and self-denial down here. The Abbé Vitalis was right: Fanny was a heathen. She limited her

desires and her curiosity to the visible world, where she sought only happiness. She did not realise that whole systems of morals had been founded on the purifying virtue of sorrow; she experienced not the slightest desire to redeem herself by torture, not knowing herself lost; and all the Russian novelists in the world could not have converted her to the religion of human suffering.

What then did she seek, and what did she find in the books lent her by Augustine, unless it was Augustine himself? And she read these books with an industry and patience which delighted Monsieur de Chanteprie. Nowadays, when the curate of Rouvrenoir came to the 'Three Limes,' she made a point of questioning him on religious subjects. And then, before long, she would forget the Trinity, redemption, grace, original sin, and begin to speak of Monsieur de Chanteprie, so that the abbé said to himself: 'The good God was only the necessary prelude to this.'

She said one day:

'I wonder what will become of Monsieur de Chanteprie, for I can't believe that he will always live at Old Hautfort.'

'And why not?'

'He may get married.'

'With his mother's consent! Why, Madame de Chanteprie will frighten all girls away! She is a saint, I grant you; but as a mother-in-law——!'

'Is she so terrible?'

'She is a fossil.'

A shadow passed over Fanny's face.

'And can you not rescue Monsieur de Chanteprie

from such an influence? You are his friend—perhaps his confessor.'

The abbé protested :

'His friend, certainly. His confessor, never!'

'Why not?'

'How could I direct that noble, scrupulous soul, always dissatisfied with itself which sees not life because it looks higher than life! One would have to be both learned and a saint, madame, and I am only a poor, ignorant, dull, country curate.'

'You libel yourself, Father.'

'Alas!'

The curate's voice seemed to betray secret suffering, but Fanny dared not question him.

XI

‘WHERE are we?’ asked Fanny.

‘Between Milon and St. Lambert,’ replied Augustine. ‘You are not tired?’

She uttered a cry of passionate happiness.

‘I—tired? I could go to the end of the world! It is all so beautiful!’

She pointed to the sky of cloud-flecked blue, a misty blue, its clouds pierced by the sun and leaving no shadows in their flight. The road wound between two wooded slopes which seemed to meet and mingle in a perspective of dull ultramarine. The masses of verdure were interspersed with cultivated patches—yellow wheat, pale-toned, lightly waving oats, green rye dotted with cornflowers. Here and there could be seen roofs of tiles, slates, or thatch, clustered in little groups, rows of poplars traversing the moist meadows, and silvery willows indicating the course of a brook.

‘And yet this is the valley which our fathers called a dreary and horrible wilderness!’ said Augustine. ‘I love that horizon which seems to be always approaching and yet always retreating, that landscape of simple outlines, harmonious and calm, that limited and peaceful landscape, which bounds one’s look, and detains the mind in that spot which it has chosen for its harbour of refuge. As a matter of

fact, since we decided to make this excursion together, I have brought you here in thought hundreds of times. And hundreds of times I have dreamt of the happiness of walking at your side on this road, and saying to you at last: 'There is Port-Royal!'

'You are happy?'

'Ah! madame, if only you could experience the same joy I feel, and the same emotion! You are here as an amused and curious passer-by; but everything in this valley speaks to my very heart. I am at home here; I am introducing you to the domain of my ancestors, to my chosen country. And I should like the sky to smile yet more kindly, and the desert of Chevreuse to be still more charming, and the shade of Racine himself to welcome you under the poplars of Port-Royal.'

'What! am I then but "an amused and curious passer-by," and nothing more? You treat me as an alien, and that's not nice of you. Since we have talked so much of Port-Royal, and of all the Chantepries who have lived there, I assure you the place has become as dear to me as to you.'

They passed by the houses of Saint Lambert: Augustine greeted with a look and a word the presbytery of Le Nain de Tillemont, who was resting in the shade of his old elm-trees; they passed the church and the little burial-ground where, under an ash with drooping branches, whose foliage seems limp with fatigue, are huddled together the broken gravestones, and the crosses of rusty iron, bearing withered circlets which were once wreaths. After the road from Dampierre, the valley suddenly grows

wider and is hollowed out in the form of a funnel: then there is a steep, pebbly path and a crumbling wall.

'We are at Port-Royal,' said Monsieur de Chanteprie. 'Let's go first to the caretaker's house: he knows me and will lend me the key of the museum, where we can go straight away, without being bothered by the worthy man and his talk. Take my arm: these ill-kept roads are full of ruts.'

She gathered up her gown of mauve cambric which was catching in the brambles, and obediently took Augustine's arm. Before them was a sort of deserted park, with dried-up, yellow lawns, paths bordered by hedges, and fragments of wall covered by a moss so dark as to be almost black. They followed the deep-cut path which leads to the 'Solitude'; they perceived the wooden cross erected on the hillock where the nuns once sat to spin and sew in the heat of the day. Monsieur de Chanteprie entered the caretaker's house alone, and returned with the key of the museum. Fanny looked at the ruins of the barn and dovecot among the trees, and the shapeless fragment of a tower constructed during the Fronde.

'I warned you beforehand, madame! Your artistic sense will be disappointed; there are here neither pillars, nor statues, nor broken porticoes, nor anything of that which composes the traditional beauty of ruins: there are only memories. The primitive abbey and its annexes were destroyed in 1709, and its violators even dragged the dead from their tombs. Conjure up the scene: try to imagine those great buildings, that thirteenth century church

which I showed you on Mademoiselle Boulongne's plan. Here were the outer courtyard and the guest-house; down there was Madame de Longueville's house, and up there on the hill was the farmhouse where the gentlemen stayed. Let's go further on. Take care not to strike your foot against those stones in the brushwood. This is the site of the church. The primeval soil, which was very damp, and which the pond often overflowed, was raised in 1651, and Mother Angélique had many cartloads of sand spread over it. Those who carried out the work of destruction did not dig up the ground to demolish the foundations of the sanctuary, and recent excavations have brought to light fragments of pillars which mark the form of the nave and the basement of the pulpit. On the very spot where the altar formerly stood has been built this white chapel, guarded by the busts of Pascal and Racine. It is the museum of Port-Royal.'

They walked side by side, reading the sentences engraved on the stones. The grass-plot, divided up by narrow paths, looked like a French garden. Pigeons flew round them. At the entrance to the choir a half-wild crimson rose, brushed by Fanny's skirt, shed a glorious shower of petals. Augustine cut off a spray for his friend.

'Put these roses in your belt, please. They will remind me of the red cross the nuns wore. They are simple little flowers, almost devoid of perfume, such as might spring from the dust of the dead; but for us they are sacred blossoms.'

'How sensitive you are to the charm of inanimate things!' said Fanny. 'Indeed, it costs me no great

effort of the imagination to recall and wonder at the Port-Royal of ancient days, evoked by your words. Yes, this is really your native air, and you seem quite different here from what you are at the "Three Limes." You are more yourself. Give me the flowers. I will keep them in memory of our walk. But, tell me, is it not a sacrilege? I am a sinner, and if Mother Angélique saw me——'

'Come and greet Mother Angélique. She will forgive us.'

He opened the grated door of the oratory, and made Fanny enter the cool apartment, lighted by glass windows and adorned with pictures and engravings. There were glass-fronted bookcases against the walls, a table in the centre, and at the far end a statue of the Virgin.

'Look at these portraits, madame. They are rather poor copies, after Philippe de Champaigne. Look at the articles in these glass cases: fragments of cloth, mosaics, a porringer, a reliquary, a bronze coffer which once contained a dried-up heart. Those books in the bookcases—those large books bound in brown leather—are the *Augustinus*, the *Frequent Communion*, the *Necrology*, the works of Nicole, the translations of Le Maistre and De Saci. This clock with the white painted case was given to the nuns by Arnauld d'Andilly, and placed in the hall of the community. Look at these autograph letters. What beautiful French handwriting. You can see that the pen traversed the paper with deliberation and precision.'

'The people who wrote like that were certainly not victims of neurasthenia. And what is this?'

'That, madame, is the plaster mask of Pascal taken after he was dead.'

'Oh!' she said; 'how he must have suffered!'

A feeling of pity detained her in front of the face with its prominent nose, sunken eyelids, and weary, relaxed mouth.

'So they die in fear and sadness, even the saints themselves, those who seek God in fear and trembling!'

She turned to Augustine with a distressed look. He said gently, as if to reassure her:

'What matter the scars which the soul imprints on the suffering flesh before tearing itself away, in the terrors of the supreme struggle for freedom! Those closed eyes had shed tears of joy; that relaxed mouth had shouted with ecstasy. Remember the transports of the *Mystery of Jesus*. Don't let this image of death frighten you, my friend. We must approach God with simplicity and trust: He is found as soon as we begin to seek Him. Those who are looking at us knew it well.'

He pointed to the portraits, whose fixed eyes seemed to say:

'Who are you?'

And whilst Fanny was reading aloud the names inscribed on the frames, Augustine de Chanteprie, in the depths of his heart, was replying:

'I am a man of your race; I am a son of those Chantepries who in your company enjoyed the blessings of a life of renunciation. Many a long day have I known and loved you, ye venerable virgins and pious hermits, the preceptors and companions of my ancestors. I know you, Angélique the

reformer, and you Agnes, and you Marie-Claire, and you Angélique of St. John, who bear my mother's name and a certain resemblance to her in the sadness of your eyes and the firmness of that delicate mouth set in the pinched oval of your face. I know you, teachers and penitents, Saint Cyran, Arnauld, and Singlin, and you, Monsieur de Saci, and you, Monsieur Hamon, with your fine blue eyes, and you, Monsieur de Pontchateau, with your rubicund face under your black wig. I have lived among you, I know you all, and I know every stone of your retreat, every tree in your valley. I have heard the voice of your solitude; I have known the charm of that death which delighted you. And I have dreamed sometimes; dreamed of leaving all to gain all, to spend my days in work and prayer, speaking little, thinking much, limiting my ambitions and desires within the compass of yon blue-peaked horizon! Such has been my dream; but I was thinking of the world as younger by three hundred years. Port-Royal is now but the ruin of a ruin, and I have found it to be naught but stones, brambles, silence, and memory.'

The Holy Mothers clad in white, the learned Doctors draped in black, seemed to say with their dumb lips:

'We know you not.'

'You do not recognise me, because a woman is with me,' was Augustine's reply. 'You look at her severely, Monsieur Le Maistre, you whom Mother Agnes deterred from marriage. You frown, Monsieur de Pontchateau, you who were not impervious to the charms of a Roman lady. Remember the virtuous

attachment for their husbands which characterised your friends, the ladies de Liancourt and de Luynes. Recall the Christian marriage of Monsieur Issali, honoured as it was by the prayers and the presents of Mother Angélique. Look without wrath upon this creature of God, whom I have chosen, and whom I lead by obscure paths to eternal truth. The full light of grace has not shed its radiance upon her—but I love her for her misery, her ignorance, her errors, for the blood of Christ which covers all her sins. Forgive her for being young and beautiful! Forgive me for loving her!’

Thus communed Augustine de Chanteprie with his soul, alarmed by the mysterious hostility of the dead.

‘What are you thinking of?’ said Fanny, in her caressing voice.

‘My thoughts were wandering. I was amusing myself in a childish way by endowing these silent faces with life: the holy men were asking me what I was and what you were, and what we were doing in their retreat.’

‘And what did you reply?’

‘You shall know what I replied. Come, madame.’

They crossed the spot where the church formerly stood, and stopped before a little enclosure where rose a funeral stela.

‘That is the “outer burial ground” and Racine’s tomb, is it not?’ said the young woman. ‘Poor Racine! His teachers hated the falsehoods of art just as much as they hated the realities of love.’

She was silent, dismayed at having pronounced the word.

The young man smiled.

'I remember,' said he, 'the morning Monsieur Forgerus, my dear master, brought me to Port-Royal for the first time. I was sixteen years old. The last snow of winter was melting on the first green of spring; the air was keen, the sun mild, and there were violets in the hollow paths. I had just been reading *Bérénice*. You, madame, who, when only a young girl, had read everything, good books and bad, modern and ancient——'

'The modern ones especially!'

'You cannot understand the frame of mind in which I approached Racine. I was, by education and character, like some young Frenchman of 1680, and I made acquaintance with the classics in all the freshness of novelty. Monsieur Forgerus said that *Bérénice* was a rather feeble play, an elegy in dialogue, unworthy of the tragic Muse.'

'Your Monsieur Forgerus' opinions were somewhat out-of-date.'

'Alas! he did not suspect that I was youthfully enamoured of the Jewish queen.'

'It was your first passion?'

'It was my only passion. You laugh? My ideas must seem to you more absurd than the wigs and sedan chairs of those old days.'

She replied:

'You have a charming mind. And what became of your first love?'

'Monsieur Forgerus regarded Racine with the eyes of Port-Royal. I, the poor pupil, looked at Port-Royal with the eyes of Racine. We walked through the woods where the pupil of Lancelot called below his breath on Chariclea. We passed

under those poplars whose noble elegance, and simple, dignified form, remind one of Racine's verse, and who murmur eternally a trembling elegy. Listen, madame, to the poplars of Port-Royal.'

He pointed to those graceful trees which spring from the ever-damp soil, the pale-toned and lightly built trees, almost feminine in their characteristics, whose quivering music strikes the ear as an inarticulate and melodious prayer.

'On this spot my tutor talked to me about Pascal and Arnauld; as for me, I fancied I was Titus about to sacrifice Bérénice to my glory and the interests of the Roman nation. Oh! I sacrificed her heroically, with good grace, like a gentleman. But is it not odd that at Port-Royal I should have had my first forebodings of love?'

'Your first move was towards sacrifice,' said Fanny. 'How very Jansenist! And, tell me—was that a presage too?'

'How?'

'I mean—No, I don't mean anything. Let us go on!'

She laughed somewhat constrainedly. Monsieur de Chanteprie persisted. He had become very serious again, with that gentle air of gravity which Fanny found irresistible.

'Tell me your thought, your whole thought.'

'I am thinking—you know well enough—if you loved Bérénice, if Bérénice loved you, and if something or some one—your mother, for instance, or your God—commanded you to sacrifice the woman you loved—'

'I hope my duty would prove stronger than my passion,' replied Augustine.

Her look was more eloquent than any words could have been.

‘You don’t know the strength of love. You have only been in love with the fancies born of your imagination. Come! you are a mere child!’

‘What!’ he said. ‘You believe me incapable of love—you!’

There was astonishment in his voice, mingled with sadness, and an infinitely tender reproach.

‘Truly,’ said he, ‘decadent poets have not instructed my youth, and the word “love” represents to me something solemn and sacred! I have never uttered it to any woman. I have never confounded it with gross desire, the call of flesh to flesh. Never——’

He hesitated a moment in his confidences.

‘At the age of nineteen I saw one day quite by chance a girl’s bare bosom, and I swear to you that the idea of love never for a moment entered into the involuntary disturbance of the senses I experienced. And this first encounter with woman even inspired me with a kind of terror, a nameless repugnance. I saw only the temptation to sin it afforded!’

‘Strange!’ said Fanny. ‘If you had told me this a few weeks ago I should have thought your sentiments monstrous and unnatural. But now I think I understand you: you look at beauty, art, love, life itself, with the eyes of a Christian.’

‘And I can only love with the heart of a Christian. Fanny!’ (he ventured to utter her name aloud) ‘Fanny, is not that a tender and consoling assurance for the loved one? The woman I love will be loved solely, unswervingly, to the grave, even through the mysterious punishments and rewards of eternity,

for, in spite of unequal merits, God will remember His promise, and will not sever those whom He has united. Oh! Fanny, don't you feel what such a love is worth: a love which nothing can check, which gives everything, which never despairs, which is capable of silent renunciation as well as heroic ambition, the love in fact of a man who does not believe in death?'

He spoke in a passionate voice, drawing up his tall figure to its full height, his blue eyes kindling strangely.

'Ah!' cried Fanny, disturbed and trembling, 'why do you speak to me thus? Listening to you, I who am not—not yet—a Christian, I ask myself if I have ever been truly loved, if I have ever loved truly. If you only knew what the world calls love! If you only knew the baseness and cowardice of men—and the vileness of their desires. If you only suspected what degrading memories you stir in my mind! Why do you talk like this to me—to me!'

'Because—that sacrifice of one's dream and one's love, that sacrifice which I am capable of making, and the thought of which torments me at this moment—you could spare us that sacrifice, Fanny!'

'Spare *us*?'

'Oh! Fanny, you said: "I am not—*not yet*—a Christian." But just take one single step. God only asks that you should be willing. And already you seem to me to be anxious and disturbed. I believe there is a secret work going on in you. Separate! Can we separate *now*—after this avowal! It is no longer possible now, is it?'

'Oh! what do I know?' she exclaimed. 'What do you want of me? It is terrible. Am I mistress

of my rebellious, wandering spirit? Can I believe in spite of myself? What is the cause of the emotion, the joy I feel? I don't know myself. You have intoxicated my reason and my heart. Believe! love! But I don't know whether it is God whom I seek, or you whom I love!

'You seek God in loving me' (and suddenly Augustine turned pale). 'You have said it yourself, you love me! It is true, then! The hour has come! I did not think it was so near. Oh! Fanny, I did not spread a snare for you; I did not plan this conversation, this confession. We have spoken in spite of ourselves. God has brought it all about! He is bringing you to the light at last, He is arousing you, He promises you shall be mine. Oh! my only love! Take away your hands. Let me look at you. Oh! your smile, your sweet tears! You love me! You love me! God is good.'

He drew her hands away almost roughly, and, in a paroxysm of joy, he spoke to her face to face.

'Fanny, I will lead you, I will save you! What are the rebellions of reason? Love—love both human and divine will break down everything, and sweep away all obstacles. Don't dispute, don't resist! Let grace have its way. Oh! my friend; oh! my companion to all eternity; oh! you dear rebellious and conquered soul, my beloved——'

He held her to his breast. She raised her head, and said with a sigh:

'If only it were true! But what are you doing? You hardly know me. It is folly, you poor child! You are so young! And I—I have lived ten lives. You see I can scarcely look at you or speak to you. I am almost ashamed.'

'You have suffered so much! You must be happy now, my Fanny.'

'Ah!' she said, 'there is nobody like you, nobody loves as you love. Well then, persuade me, lead me. I will do all you want, I will believe everything. I did not know I could care so much for you. Say again: "My beloved."'

He murmured:

'My beloved.'

The wind was rising; the poplars rustled in the sunlight, and on the meadows a long green wave rose and fell. The crimson roses in Fanny's belt shed their petals. The breeze carried them over the hedge and scattered them on Racine's tomb. The lovers forgot the place and the hour, and the fact that they were among the tombs; they looked at each other with enchanted eyes.

Of this hour and the hours that followed there only remained to them the dim and uncertain memory of a dream, scattered images, confused sensations, sentences unfinished and begun over again. They lunched at Chabourne, in the open air, in the garden of the inn, and the good woman of the house was astonished that they were not hungry. Ah! that meal on the rustic table, the blue of the sky between the branches overhead, the odour of honey rising from the coppice, the perpetual delight, the surprise, the awakening of the mind to a new feeling which imparted freshness to everything!

Fanny allowed herself to be led, indifferent to the country she walked through, in the semi-somnambulism of a great happiness. A divine

stupor paralysed her reason. Subdued, enthralled, clinging to Augustine's arm, she was simply an embodiment of quivering emotion. For a long while they wandered in the woods of Mollerets which overlook Port-Royal, and then, as the path suddenly declined, they stopped on the crest of the hill. A rocky promontory jutted out like the prow of a vessel, overhanging the red clay at its base, and under the blue and white sky, with its large light-encircled clouds, was spread out like a panorama the valley—one mass of green: the emerald green of the fields streaked with their ribbon-like roads, the olive green of the heather, the silvery green of the aspens and poplars, the dense, surging green of the woods which traced a long circular line on the horizon.

Augustine and Fanny rested on the rock, on which grew slender pines. Dead leaves were decaying in the pools of water left by a storm in the hollows of the stone. Seated side by side, their hands clasped, their faces very near each other, they felt around them the indefinable melancholy of space and silence.

'Are you happy, Fanny?'

'Too happy. I wish to-morrow would never come.'

'To-morrow will be still happier than to-day.'

'I know those to-morrows. Oh! the joy of love which is just beginning!'

Her eyes fell. Augustine saw that she remained, in spite of their confidences, a mysterious being. Whilst they were wandering in the woods, he had wanted to talk only of herself, hoping to learn to know her well. But, from the moment of their

first talk as lovers, he could see how unusual and delicate was the situation. The woman torn by life and its passions, was she not the elder, the initiator?—even when she humbled herself to say: ‘Teach me, direct me!’ Already she had uttered strange words; she had alluded to the degrading sorrows of her marriage, to the corrupting influences which would perhaps have exercised their sway over her if she had not met Augustine. The young man dared not let his thoughts dwell on the riddle of Fanny’s life, which he suspected to have been very sad, and even humiliating for her; and he gathered nothing as yet from her semi-confidential allusions, excepting that Fanny had suffered much. She enjoyed Augustine’s trustfulness, his exquisite simplicity: she gazed into his soul as into a perfectly clear, deep, peaceful lake, in which she saw only her own image mingled with the reflection of the heavens.

‘Fanny, what are you afraid of? Have I not removed your fears? Don’t think of things which grieve you. To-morrow, my friend, we will see the Abbé Vitalis. He has guessed our secret; he is very fond of me, and has a high opinion of you. I am sure he will not refuse to give you religious instruction and advice. Ah! if only Monsieur Forgerus were in France!’

‘Do you often write to Monsieur Forgerus?’

‘No; I must admit I don’t. And he, absorbed as he is in his work, writes a short letter to my mother only too rarely—about every four or five months. I have sometimes felt inclined to write and tell him about my love, and my plans, but a sort of shyness has withheld me from doing so. I have been afraid of expressing my feelings awkwardly, and alarming

Monsieur Forgerus, who in turn would alarm my mother.'

'Your mother suspects nothing?'

'My mother is a solitary, a recluse. She sees no one but Monsieur Le Tourneur and the Courdimanches. I will take the worthy Courdimanches partly into my confidence, so that it will be a point of honour with them not to betray us. People are so ill-natured in small towns! When my old friends know that you want to become a good Catholic, they will love you, I am sure.'

'But, your mother—Monsieur Vitalis has told me of her lofty intellect and her virtues. I am a little afraid of her.'

'When my mother knows your sad story, when she is certain that you share our faith, she will not ask whether you are rich or poor, plain or pretty——'

'You are an optimist, my dear Augustine. Madame de Chanteprie of course expects as a daughter-in-law a young girl of your own sort, brought up in a convent in the good old-fashioned way, whom you would not have to convert before marrying her.'

'Well, that same young girl has been introduced to us, and I didn't want to see her a second time.'

'Your mother and your friends will say that it is folly at your age to marry a woman older than yourself, an artist, earning her own living, with no family or connections, nor even a dowry. And, as a matter of fact, I am myself inclined to think that you want to do a very foolish thing.'

'Is it folly to carry out the will of God? and was not our meeting providential for both of us?'

Fanny murmured :

'A young girl, pure like yourself, a mind unspotted. Yet no, an ignorant child could not love you as I do. She could not understand what it is that constitutes the exceptional and unique charm of your character. As for myself, I love you' (with an involuntary gesture she pressed her cheek against Augustine's shoulder, thrilled by the contact with the rough cloth). 'I have not a sublime soul, I am not a saint, I am no heroine: you will not admire me, Augustine, but you will see that I can love well. I am partly Italian, through my mother, and I am not like those coquettish and prudent Frenchwomen who kindle the fire of men's desires by their caprices, and drive them to distraction by their refusals. Love makes me weak and passionate, but sincere. I don't deceive, I don't lie; I hate wretched subterfuges. And it's terrible, this feeling which gives me up, body and soul, absolutely defenceless, to a man whom I am not sure is altogether mine.'

'I am wholly yours, Fanny.'

'Ah! I am afraid of you and of myself. I am afraid of loving you too much. For days past I have done nothing but look out for you. But I was still calm. Our little daily joys sufficed me. Now, I see into the very depths of my heart; I know how much I love you, and how——'

'Don't you know too how much and how truly I love you?'

• 'Alas! I have lost the habit of happiness: this unexpected treasure you offer me seems so fragile in my trembling hands. Oh! my friend, are you quite sure of yourself? Tell me, you have not called me to life, joy, and sunshine, only to cast me back into

solitude and night? I yield myself to you with such a trusting heart! Don't hurt me! I have suffered so much! I should so like to suffer no more, to have a little happiness! Be gentle and indulgent with me.'

'My darling! My poor darling!'

'It was so cruel to be alone, always alone! The solitude, the tedium—what could I do? I had moments of desperation. And then I knew you, I loved you. How our eyes spoke in spite of ourselves! Oh! my own, my love, now that you have come to me, tell me, tell me again, that you will never leave me, never, as long as life lasts!'

'Fanny, don't you know what you are to me? You are the sister, the friend, the sweetheart, the wife, all that a man most venerates and adores in a woman. And like you, my beloved, I implore you, since you have come into my life, never leave it again, my own love!'

They looked at each other, transfigured by a wonderful expression of almost sorrowful ecstasy. And Fanny suddenly rested her hand on the fair hair, with a gently 'caressing movement.

A stormy gust of wind suddenly came up from the west, driving along great clouds which covered the sky with splendour. Violet shadows overspread the hills, and the sombre voices of the pines and oaks replied to the distant murmur of the poplars. A flock of pigeons rose from the valley, hovered uncertainly, and, scattering and then reuniting, regained on their strong pinions the shelter of the Port-Royal dovecot. A few drops of rain fell.

'Let us go!' said Augustine.

They entered the wood, he pale and thoughtful,

she still quivering with emotion, and returned to Port-Royal by the de Longueville gate.

'Wait a moment, Fanny: I have kept the key of the oratory; I will hurry to the caretaker, and come back to you.'

The worthy man seemed quite indignant when he saw Augustine.

'Monsieur de Chanteprie, is it possible! I have been looking for you everywhere. You left the door open. Oh, sir! it was very wrong of you.'

He seemed to fear that an enemy, a Jesuit perhaps, might have crept into the museum to rob it of its treasures. And he frowned, grumbling his reproaches the while. Monsieur de Chanteprie followed him to the chapel.

'Look,' he said, 'there's no damage done. No one has come in my absence.'

The caretaker, still grumbling, made a careful inspection. Augustine did not listen to him. A twilight glimmer falling from the glass windows brought into relief the celebrated canvases of Philippe de Champaigne. The gold of the frames had become dim, and the faces of the holy men and women looked out in their ashen pallor from the black background. Their eyes, fixed on Augustine, expressed neither sympathy nor anger. And for the first time Monsieur de Chanteprie realised that these dead people were indeed dead.

He stood rooted to the threshold, motionless, breathing in an odour as of the tomb. The shadows grew darker. The caretaker closed the door, which creaked lugubriously. Augustine, lowering his head, departed like an alien through the ruins.

XII

ROUVRENOIR is a village of sixty houses, built in the valley, on the spot where the wooded slopes divide and disclose a scrap of level ground. In this parish are included several hamlets, Gariguières, Aubryotte, Morlin, Les Roches, and Chêne-Pourpre, scattered in the recesses of the land, in the forest, on the bits of level ground, on the slope of the hills. The neighbouring road from Old Hautfort to Yvelettes follows the curve of the valley and passes through Rouvrenoir. An artificial cutting divides the high promontory on which stand, facing each other, divided by the road and propped up by embankments of masonry, the schoolhouse on the right, and on the left the church, outlined against the sky.

This church, plain, poor, and beautiful as it is, towers over the village itself, whose highest houses do not attain to the level of its ten-century-old foundations. The greyish bulk of the steeple, with its roof of brown and mossy tiles, patched here and there with red ones, can be seen from a great distance, among the gnarled pines of the burial-ground. A flight of stone steps provides access to the church up the side of the cutting, and up these same steps pass both wedding and funeral processions. And loungers on the road below, raising

their heads, can see the veils of brides floating in the sun above, or the black drapery of coffins shaken by the footsteps of the bearers.

Thirty yards from the church, the parsonage occupies the corner of a little square. It is a fairly comfortable house, built between a courtyard and a garden. The Abbé Vitalis had lived there for twelve years with his mother—a hard-featured old peasant woman with a suspicious eye, who was always mumbling paternosters. She received coldly people who came as visitors, and disturbed ‘her boy the abbé.’ But she was especially churlish towards women.

One evening in August Madame Manolé rang the parsonage bell. The old woman, who was hanging out linen in the courtyard, did not stir. She had recognised the Parisian, for whom she had an unaccountable aversion.

Fanny rang such a loud peal that the Abbé Vitalis himself opened a first-floor window.

‘Mother!’ he cried, ‘let Madame Manolé in: I am just coming down!’

His mother obeyed with a bad grace, and Fanny followed her into the little dining-room of the parsonage. The yellowish-red wall-paper, loosened in places by the damp, a few commonplace lithographs, an ink-spotted cloth on the table, a pipe-rack under a rough shelf of pine-wood on which stood a few books—all spoke of wretchedness and careless housekeeping. Fanny, alone in the room, could perceive the shadow of the peasant woman, prowling round the window; and the sounds of a stifled altercation reached her ears.

‘I am master here.’

'So children actually order their old mothers about! Martial, it's because you're a priest that you don't respect me!'

'I do respect you, but I ask you to leave me alone.'

'Yes, so that they may chatter about us all over the country. You don't know how ill-natured people are. I tell you they'll write all sorts of things about you to the Bishop——'

'That's enough!'

The abbé hurriedly entered the dining-room.

'Please excuse us, madame. My mother is deaf, and I was busy upstairs. Do you want to ask me something?'

'I want to ask you to come and dine this evening at the 'Three Limes,' with Monsieur de Chanteprie.'

'Delighted. And—is there nothing else?'

'Well—yes.'

'I thought so from your manner. Nothing serious?'

'Yes, and no. May I speak to you frankly, as if I were at confession?'

'Certainly!'

'Well, Father, I am very vexed with you. I owe you a grudge.'

'Why?'

'Because you sent me to the Abbé Le Tourneur when Monsieur de Chanteprie asked you to begin my religious instruction.'

The abbé's face clouded.

'Monsieur Le Tourneur is a conscientious priest and a man of the world. He can talk; he can

guide souls with care and gentleness. I expect Monsieur de Chanteprie thinks him somewhat easy-going, but a spiritual director who was too severe in his methods would have discouraged you at the outset.'

'You are Augustine's friend, Father, and, I venture to say, you are *our* friend. I had every confidence in you. Why should you desert me thus, at such a grave crisis in my history—a crisis which must decide my future?'

'I did what I thought right,' said Martial Vitalis, fixing his eyes on the floor; 'be assured I was not wanting in friendship. But I could not feel sure of accomplishing a task beyond my strength. I know my ignorance and clumsiness. No, I could not and would not take the responsibility of your conversion.'

'Do you think me so difficult to convert?'

'You are proud and given to reasoning.'

'That's exactly what Monsieur Le Tourneur says.'

'Really? But I should not have thought the curate of Hautfort very severe.'

Fanny exclaimed. Severe, no—Monsieur Le Tourneur was not severe. He was secretly, but infinitely, scornful. His smooth politeness concealed the contempt of a St. Paul for the inconstant frail sex, whose duty it is to be silent and obey. He regarded the ladies of his parish as pupils of a perpetual catechism class, and treated them as if they were no more than twelve years old—grown-up children, even aged children, among whom he and his subordinates distributed gold and

silver medals. He liked them to be simple, docile, and pious without mysticism, for he distrusted fanatics, inspired women, and aspirants to sanctity, and one Madame de Chanteprie in his parish was enough. But he hated, above all, women who were well-informed and could reason. One can and must argue with a man; a woman should implicitly accept the ideas imposed on her. Now, Fanny did not receive the priest's lightest words like manna from Heaven. She showed a disgraceful astonishment at some things, and a reprehensible curiosity about others. There were constant skirmishes between her and Monsieur Le Tourneur; each would trip up the other in the windings of a syllogism. Every moment the abbé would rush to his books, and quote passages which he hurled forth like bombs, without producing the slightest effect on the mind of the unbeliever. He enumerated the great men who had professed the Catholic faith; Fanny enumerated all the other great men who had lived in indifference. There were bitter duels in which the priest and the woman fought with celebrated names as their weapons: Spinoza against St. Augustine, and Darwin against Moses. Monsieur Le Tourneur wound up by relating the folly of Nietzsche, the remorse of Voltaire, and the conversion of Littré when *in extremis*.

'That is the point at which we have arrived, Father!' concluded Fanny. 'I have tried to acquire imagination; I have carefully cultivated my sensibility. I have begun to practise before believing. And I am no further than I was two months ago.'

The abbé shook his head.

‘I have seen utter heathens converted in their old age, because they remembered in spite of themselves their catechism and their first communion. Through having believed in the immortality of the soul in their earliest childhood, there remained in the depths of their hearts dim hopes and fears as to the future. These atheistic braggarts, brought up in the truth of the gospels, remained Christians by instinct and habit. You understand now why the Church attaches so much importance to early religious training. But you, madame, did not receive this early training. You carry in you the seeds of doubt. Your mind must first of all be cleared. And that is what Monsieur Le Tourneur is trying to do.’

‘But if your God exists, He knows that I want to believe,’ cried Fanny. ‘He should help me——’

‘Help yourself, and God will help you. Yes, madame, God knows that you want to believe, but He also knows why you want to believe, and that you only seek in Christianity a means of assuring your earthly happiness. You bring into the sanctuary an altogether unworthy motive. You do not love God for Himself, and above all else : you love Monsieur de Chanteprie. If that young man had not been a good Christian, if he had not exerted a sort of mastery over your mind, you would have remained indifferent and unbelieving.’

‘Perhaps—probably.’

‘And, besides, you reason too much. To what end? You expect poor Monsieur Le Tourneur to *prove* to you the existence of God, the immortality

of the soul, etc. But Pascal said long ago that religion is not a matter of certainty to the reason. One does not prove God; one feels Him. "Faith is God made manifest in the heart." You must love Him in order to believe in Him; and you do not love Him. Imitate Captain Courdimanche; he does not reason, he loves. He does not dispute, he practises. Real and lasting conversions are miracles wrought by love.'

'Once I should have said: "Phenomena of auto-suggestion."'

'The cloven hoof again!' said Vitalis.

'Don't smile, Father. I am perfectly sincere. I love Augustine. Alas! I love him more than God, and I want to love God because of him.'

'Yes; you impose conditions on God: "O Lord, give me the man I love, and I will love Thee in return."'

'Ah! I ought not to trifle with myself,' said the young woman. 'I ought to tell Monsieur de Chanteprie that I am wavering and drawing back. And I dare not. No, I dare not. I am afraid of losing Augustine. I cannot live without him now. I love him.'

The abbé replied:

'And I pity you. Your case is a sad one. If you truly wish to be converted, you should leave Monsieur de Chanteprie for some months. You could make a retreat in a convent.'

'Never!'

'Why not?'

'I won't leave Augustine.'

'Well, take care that he does not leave you first.'

My poor friend, your Augustine has Jansenism in his blood. His inflexible religion permits of no compromise with Heaven. Study him well: he is a man of one idea—simple, sublime, pitiless. If you were to put yourself between him and his God, he would trample you under foot to reach God; he would trample his mother under foot!

‘You drive me to despair.’

‘I am warning you.’

‘And can you do nothing for me?’

‘Nothing more.’

‘You still refuse to convert me?’

‘Absolutely. I should only blunder. There are other men in the world besides Monsieur Le Tourneur and me. Seek another director, and remember my advice: go into a convent.’

‘Like Ophelia. Many thanks! I shall remain at the “Three Limes.”’

‘At your own risk and peril!’

‘Be it so!’

‘What a strange priest that Abbé Vitalis is!’ thought Fanny, on her way back to the ‘Three Limes.’ ‘He must be keeping something back. Ah! he’s not an enthusiast! But neither is the Abbé Le Tourneur an enthusiast, nor that fat, jolly Abbé Chavançon, whom they introduced to me the other day at the Courdimanches.’

At the ‘Three Limes’ she found Augustine. He was in a state of anxiety, and told her the reason: Madame de Chanteprie was half-paralysed, and could no longer walk. The doctor expressly ordered her the waters of Bagnères-les-Pins, a new

watering-place in the Lower Pyrenees, recently made fashionable by the convents which received boarders. He even insisted that Madame Angélique should remain in the South at least six weeks. And in consequence of the invalid's obstinate refusal, Augustine thought of asking the Abbé Le Tourneur to bring his influence to bear on her.

'I admire and deplore my mother's courage. She accepts suffering as a purifying grace. I should not be surprised to hear her say that a Christian should be ashamed not to be ill, and that very robust health is a disgrace to the truly penitent. She endures her sufferings with patience and the doctor's remedies with impatience.'

'Have not you—her son—any influence over her, then? Are you afraid of your mother?'

'Afraid! No. But I am overcome with awe when I enter the poor, bare room in which my mother has lived for the last fifteen years. What I know of her austerity humiliates me before her. How should I dare to give her advice, or dispute her will?'

'Yours is an odd version of maternal tenderness and filial love! Your mother might kill herself for the greater glory of God, and you would only say Amen.'

'If you knew my mother you would realise that she does not want to be loved in the same way as others.'

'I can see that. Ah! my dear Augustine, you complicate at will the most simple things. You can't move a finger without disturbing God and the devil.'

'Don't joke like that, Fanny. You are not yourself!'
She was thinking to herself:

'What a coward I am! I ought to tell him the truth: that the Abbé Le Tourneur bores me, that life in this world interests me a hundred, a thousand times more than a problematical eternity, and that he must not expect of me impossible and useless virtues, but only what I am able to give: my love.'

The Abbé Vitalis arrived. All dinner-time Augustine was talking of his mother's heroism and sufferings. The priest censured such an excess of zeal which, he said, was only a form of pride. And he demonstrated that pride is the hereditary snare of the Jansenists.

'They are, as Voltaire wittily said, "full of pride and of St. Augustine."'

The name of Voltaire exasperated Augustine, and while the two men were disputing, Fanny was thinking of that terrible Madame de Chanteprie whom she would have to face some day. Madame de Chanteprie welcoming Fanny Manolé! The young woman was suddenly amazed at herself for having believed in the possibility of her conversion and marriage, and a great depression came over her. To be sure, when she had said to Augustine in the meadows of Port-Royal, 'I will do as you like; I will believe what you like,' she had obeyed a sudden, irresistible impulse. 'Alas!' she thought, 'were it to save my life, I could not persuade myself that two and two make five.'

'Well,' said Vitalis, replying to Augustine, 'I don't defend the Jesuits; but I maintain that a man becomes dry and withered up if buried alive in the

narrow cell of Jansenist doctrine. The Jesuits made a breach in the cell and let in a little air and daylight.'

He sometimes amused himself by teasing Monsieur de Chanteprie; but this evening Augustine would not understand the abbé's paradoxes. And Fanny, waking up from her reverie, beheld in him a man she did not know, rigid and violent, bitter in dispute—the man, in fact, of whom Vitalis said that he would trample his mother under foot to reach God.

'He is a fanatic,' she thought with alarm. 'How he forgets my presence and our love!'

Aloud she said:

'Gentlemen, be quiet, please, and let us leave the table. I am going to play you some music to calm your minds.'

She seated herself at the piano. A long arpeggio broke the stillness. The wide open door of the dining-room disclosed a pallid rectangle of light. It was not quite dark. The sky was passing slowly from pink to mauve, and already in the foreground the disc of the full moon emerged among the branches of the apple-trees.

'Listen. This is a waltz of Chopin's.'

Slow curves of melody gave place to fuller, swifter ones; there was a suggestion of landscapes compact of crystal and of mist, peopled by fairies turning in the mazes of the waltz; and now and then, mingled with deep sobs and supernatural laughter, a plaintive wail arose, a human note, a sigh of ecstasy and love.

Without, the groups of trees and the thatched roofs melted into a bluish vagueness. The wall of the courtyard was black, and the sand of the paths

looked white between the lawns. Then a ray of moonlight touched the white stone of the threshold and slid along the floor right to the feet of the musician, making in the dark room a narrow path of light, bestrewn with impalpable silver.

The last chord died softly away. Fanny, with her fingers extended and motionless, prolonged the enchantment. The moonlight and shadow played over her. And suddenly some one moved in the darkness near the piano. A stealthy hand touched the young woman's shoulder; a burning cheek almost brushed against her own, and Fanny trembled at the contact.

Augustine whispered :

'I implore you—let's go out. The music maddens me. To be there, so near you——'

Fanny rose :

'Father, are you dreaming or sleeping? You don't speak.'

'I was listening,' replied Vitalis, from the other end of the room.

'You expressly asked me to dismiss you early. Would you like a walk by moonlight? The night is so lovely and so mild, I'd like to go for a walk——Augustine?'

She could not restrain an exclamation when she saw the young man's look in the gleaming light. Oh! what a changed, transfigured face! and what eyes!—such eyes of love!

'Go on in front, Father, and you too, Monsieur de Chanteprie! I will fasten the door. We will go through the wood to the road.'

They entered the path, arched over by boughs

through which the moonlight filtered. A rain of gleaming yet pallid light fell in drops through the thousand little branches, the thousand little leaves, trickled on, and penetrated the coppice. The chestnut-trees presented an opaque density; the juniper-trees created black corners and bristling, hostile outlines. But the shower of moonlight streamed over the light foliage of the acacias, birches, and aspens, and covered their silvery trunks with liquid brilliance.

The path grew narrower, and descended towards the waste lands which border the road from Rouvrenoir. The croak of a frog could be heard among the heather. Vitalis walked in front; Fanny followed him, Augustine bringing up the rear. Now and then she turned round and smiled at him.

Never had she known him more moved, more disturbed in mind, attempting sentences and gestures which he could not finish. She herself was trembling, overcome by a strange anxiety, and seeming to expect some mysterious event. Was it the music, the odour of the wood, the moonlight night, which so disturbed their minds and senses? They dared not speak. They scarcely looked at each other. And Fanny blushed like a virgin at the thoughts which came to her.

She suddenly stopped.

'The thorns have caught in my skirt. I can't go on. Help me.'

He knelt on one knee, pulled away the thorny branch, and disengaged the stuff, which made a tearing sound. Fanny, stooping, leant one hand on his shoulder.

'Thank you,' she said. 'That's all right.'

He did not move. And suddenly, stooping lower still, he seized her foot and kissed the little tan shoe and the open-work stocking. Fanny uttered an astonished 'Oh!' Augustine rose, and, anticipating the reproach he expected, said :

'I have torn your gown. I am so clumsy. I apologise. Say nothing about it.'

She was amazed. What! the obstinate Jansenist, the austere Monsieur de Chanteprie, he who but now argued so stubbornly and would endure no contradiction, that he should actually have prostrated himself before a woman and kissed her feet in a frenzy of delirious love!

Outside the wood they found the abbé awaiting them. Fanny, somewhat embarrassed, explained the accident, and all three went on to the parsonage. The abbé seemed tired and rather depressed.

'The fog is rising,' he said; 'don't be too late. You should go home, madame. Good-bye.'

Augustine and Fanny were now alone. They retraced their steps towards Chêne-Pourpre, and, suddenly stopping in the middle of the road, they kissed each other.

Near at hand a large chestnut-tree sheltered some ruined buildings. Its foliage, bleached by the moon, was merged into the greenish blue of the sky. In the distance an atmospheric mist obscured the grey forest, and the walls of the houses were of a wonderful whiteness, a milky, pure whiteness, under the dark thatch. The landscape was no longer recognisable. Everything took on a dead and motionless aspect, as if the wonderful night were the

commencement of an eternity, as if the sun were never to return and recall the world to life.

There was neither light nor sound. Nothing to reveal the presence of the beings who slept behind those walls. The frogs no longer croaked. Nothing lived under the vault of heaven but the man and woman intoxicated by their kiss. From time to time, without disengaging their hands, they drew away and looked at each other with a rapturous expression. Taking a few steps at a time along the moonlit path, they stopped again and again to unite their lips.

XIII

THAT band of old maids and widows, which in all small towns forms the sacred sisterhood of gossip, soon guessed Augustine's innocent secret. The Courdimanches extolled the Parisian, whom they had seen two or three times. 'She was,' they said, 'a superior woman, brought up in ignorance by her negligent parents, who longed for the pale of the Church, where she hoped to find a refuge for the rest of her days.' Very well! But why did not Madame Manolé profit by the example of the pious? Why did she not try to resemble Mademoiselle Piédeloup, and Mademoiselle Marcotte, who were so modest with their plain bodices, their lowered eyelids, and their half-mourning hats? The lady from Chêne-Pourpre rode a bicycle, wore eccentric gowns, and received men! Monsieur Le Tourneur had to listen to the remonstrances which the most faithful among his parishioners addressed him in his own interest. Did he believe in the good faith of the stranger? Was he not afraid of compromising himself by receiving this person, as the curate of Rouvrenoir had compromised himself? All truly Christian hearts were sorry for poor Monsieur de Chanteprie and his sainted mother. Would it not be well to open Madame Angélique's eyes by a warning, either open or indirect?

Monsieur Le Tourneur detested 'tattle': he sent the pious ladies back to their parrots and their knitting. It was not that he had much sympathy for Fanny; he received Augustine's semi-confidential communications with some distaste; but he realised that the young man was in love, hopelessly infatuated, resolved in his idea of marriage. Madame Angélique might refuse her consent? Madame Angélique was very ill. Whatever happened, Augustine would marry Madame Manolé, converted or not converted, sooner or later. She was intelligent and experienced; she would have great influence over Augustine, and, who could tell? she might perhaps alienate him from his religion. 'Well!' thought Monsieur Le Tourneur, 'let us try to win this soul for God, and get a little good out of a great misfortune. If Madame Manolé is not with us, she will be against us. And if she is with us, Augustine, spurred on by her, will no longer refuse to serve actively the good cause. He will become bolder and more ambitious. Rich, noble, beloved, and held in high esteem in his district, he will admirably represent the Catholics in the municipal council, in the general council, even in parliament.'

Thus dreamed Monsieur Le Tourneur, impatient as he was to oppose a candidate of his choice to the radical deputy of the district. When he was thinking of the elections, he no longer considered Fanny too proud. He was influencing her, and did not despair of bringing her, with the aid of her love for Augustine, to a kindly and moderate Catholicism, which was all that a woman of the world needed.

However, Augustine was beginning to fear that his imprudent zeal would lead the young woman into a half-sincere conversion—a conversion without depth or solidity. He himself was troubled at the thought of an interminable engagement. The pious books which had long nourished and strengthened his faith cast him into grievous perplexity. Such and such a phrase of Bossuet or St. Augustine, such and such a page of the holy John Chrysostom, took on a new significance which disturbed Monsieur de Chanteprie. What he called 'affection,' his teachers termed 'lust.' Even the holy state of matrimony, said they, may be violated by too passionate a love for the creature. Augustine could not believe that the demon of wantonness had taken him in the snare of religious self-deception, but he realised at last that he loved Fanny for herself, and for himself. Indeed, the adored name, 'Fanny,' was no longer the earthly name of a soul: Augustine could not utter it now without evoking her passionate, pale face, the soft tendrils of black hair, the smile hovering on lip and cheek, the graceful turn of her neck, the full bosom hinted at under her drapery. Fanny was a woman, and she was *the* woman.

He had experienced her power that evening when, in the wood bathed in moonlight, a magic force had brought him to his knees before Fanny. Ah! those kisses on the white pathway, those long and lingering kisses which seemed to come from his very soul! Augustine had returned to Hautfort feverish, ill, talking to himself all the way. And, for the first time, the troubled thoughts which haunted his sleepless hours lacked their virginal purity.

So, to avoid temptation, and to expiate his amorous weakness, the young man begged his mother to take him with her; he would accompany her to Bagnères-les-Pins; he would take care of her and cure her. Madame de Chanteprie refused point-blank. She made up her mind at last that she would go, but with a poor woman who was ill like herself, and who would be lodged and cared for like herself under the roof of the nursing nuns, who did not receive men. What would Augustine do, all by himself, at the hotel in a strange village? He had to yield to the maternal will, delighted at the bottom of his heart, yet determined to pay fewer visits to Chêne-Pourpre.

Fanny was alarmed at his seeming neglect, wept, and declared that she was no longer loved. And, in Madame de Chanteprie's absence, passion swept away all Augustine's scruples.

Madame Manolé no longer lied to herself. She had lost all hope and all desire of conversion. The double aspect of her beauty, which so marvellously expressed her double nature, at the same time sentimental and sensual, changed by degrees, and the Bacchante showed herself under the Angel. Shaking the dust off her feet at the threshold of the temple, where she had found nothing but phantoms, words, emptiness, and death, Fanny betook herself to love, like the vintager to the vines. And gently, stealthily, reversing the manœuvre with which Augustine had attempted to entrap her mind, she dreamed of conquering him who had never yet been conquered, of converting the gloomy Christian to the sole religion of life.

She was skilful, prudent, wily, so as not to frighten him ; but he had already lost mastery over himself.

September drew to a close. The rose-trees with a last effort yielded their final blooms, and in little rustic gardens, amid the mingled light and russet shades of asparagus plants, blossomed the simple dahlias, the coreopsis with its yellow velvet flecked with brown, petunias with their violet cross on a white ground, and their fine clovelike perfume, and the charming flower of the wild endive—a star of lilac blue attached to a straight stalk of vivid green. In the narrow paths, where the privet mingled its black berries with the pale pink ones of the prick-wood, Fanny could still find a few fungi which resembled hyacinths in their full-blown splendour, twisted like large-belled golden trumpets ; but she preferred to seek, under the trees, the esculent boletus with its reddish, leathery texture, and, on the tender velvet of the meadows, the little dried-up mushrooms, the agaric with its tiny pink leaves and its pale crown, the colour of birch-bark. She was always collecting small plants, queer little insects, and prettily marked pebbles. Augustine accompanied her in her daily walks on the plain, in the forest, and in those valleys whose spring beauty, now long vanished, would always be associated in his memory with the first dawning of love. A milky vapour, impregnated with light, hovered under the blue and silver sky, and over the wooded slopes, where mingled already every tone of green, bronze, and ochre. The apple-trees were copper-red, the oaks blood-red, and the little poplars

were clothed in golden filigree. The ploughed fields wore old-rose tints. Everywhere were to be seen heaps of apples, whose fragrance pervaded the meadows, the farmyards, and the village streets, like the fragrance of the ripening autumn itself. Everywhere the cider streamed from the presses, and overflowed the vats. Melancholy days of October, intoxicating days! The plain retreated in shades of paler blue towards an indefinite horizon, and the tender tints, the softened outlines of the landscape, seemed to partake of the exquisite softness of the air—a softness which permeated everything, both animate and inanimate.

Augustine and Fanny were always together. They risked their reputation, she with the careless cynicism of the woman who loves, he with the unconsciousness of a happy child, who sees nothing and fears nothing. Marriage, and their life together, were the constant subject of their talk. Augustine no longer dreamt of possible obstacles, nor of the risks he incurred; his imagination ran riot amid his schemes for a future of unalloyed happiness.

XIV

ONE day the door of the summer-house, hidden under its red viburnum, opened furtively for the beloved one. And the shade of Adh mar must have rejoiced when the echoes of the little house resounded with a woman's steps and laughter.

Fanny had made acquaintance with the 'Grove,' the French garden, the dwelling of the former chief magistrate, the corridors paved with black and white tiles, the staircases with their heavy balusters of brown wood, and the portraits in the large drawing-room. She had looked out at the town, with its maze of roofs, and at the horizon of plain and hill; she had leant on the balustrade of the terrace; she had wandered through the symmetrical avenue of lime-trees. And all these things spoke aloud, and related the mind and history of the Chantepries.

But other voices spoke in the house of the Poppy. They told of the triumph of woman and Nature, of the seductive transgression of Adh mar. Yet he was a Chanteprie—this man of philosophy! Born at Hautfort, like all the Chantepries, he had received a strict education under the watchful care of Agnes—that Agnes who had been so miraculously cured. He had been taken when quite a child to the tomb of the blessed deacon, in the vault of

Saint Médard. And the reading of *Émile*, and the *Contrat Social*, the kiss of a lovely girl, and the sight of the gardens in flower, had driven the terrors of Christianity from his mind, and made him rejoice in the present.

A century had passed. The house encircled with poppies still stood, like a protest, a challenge, facing the conventlike building erected by the founder of the family, and to it the last of the Chantepries brought love again.

Shut up in this retreat, during the rainy days, Augustine and Fanny gave themselves up to each other. They did not notice the smile with which Jacqueline devoted herself to waiting on them, like some enchanted slave, both protector and accomplice. When she brought their meals she noisily announced her presence, stamping in her goloshes up the steps of the staircase; and in the evening, when she collected on a bunch all the keys of the house, she had a suggestive way of saying :

‘Shall I shut up the summer-house?’

These words gave the signal for departure; Fanny wrapped herself in a shawl, and Monsieur de Chanteprie said regretfully :

‘Have the carriage got ready, Jacqueline; I am going to take Madame Manolé to the “Three Limes.”’

Through the grating of the kitchen-garden the servant watched the old carriage disappearing in the distance, along the road to Chêne-Pourpre. She shrugged her shoulders with a look of sarcastic pity.

Why did she, the loved one, go away, and why did he, the lover, return alone to his empty room?

What were they waiting for? Marriage? They might wait! As long as Madame de Chanteprie lived Jacquine would not put white linen in the marriage bed. Were the young people so afraid of God, then? And in the vague hope which rose to Jacquine's lips, there was a sort of desire of revenge on that God who was killing Madame Angélique, and perhaps claiming also Augustine's barren youth.

Captain Courdimanche and the Abbé Le Tourneur several times visited the 'Three Limes,' and found the door closed. Fanny had invented many pretexts in succession for avoiding religious discussions. The curate of St. John perceived suddenly that Fanny had rendered her marriage impossible by her open imprudence. If Madame de Chanteprie came back cured, Augustine would never dare, in face of his mother's veto, to marry the woman whom all Hautfort regarded as his mistress.

So the Abbé Le Tourneur cast Fanny off. He put himself resolutely at the head of the pious band who cried out on the scandal caused by Fanny and Augustine. But Augustine avoided any interview or explanation.

One evening, towards the end of October, the lovers had just finished their meal in Augustine's sitting-room. Jacquine was clearing the table. Augustine looked at Fanny, and Fanny looked at the sun, which was setting in the distance, in a red and stormy sky.

'Look,' she said, 'that's just like the old Spanish pictures, in which a crimson sky seems to bleed as a background to crucifixions and tortures. The

town is quite black, and in one vague spot you can just guess at the crosses of the cemetery.'

Jacquine placed on the table a three-branched candlestick, piled up the plates in a basket, and said with an air of wisdom :

'A red sky in the evening means a high wind. We shall have the sort of weather one must expect at this time of year. The swallows are gathering together, and the rooks are flying in flocks over the fields. The summer is at an end, madame.'

When the table was cleared, Augustine also went to the window.

'That sky and landscape,' he said, 'speak only of sadness and death. Uncle Adh mar was ill-advised in building the summer-house here. The sight of the cemetery must have been distasteful to Rosalba Rosalind, one would think. But neither Uncle Adh mar nor his dancer paid heed to the warnings of the dead.'

'Goodness!' replied Fanny, 'I'm of Jacquine's opinion: the poor dead are dead indeed. You make them say all you want—you—the austere man you are. But if the dead could speak they would assuredly tell us that there is no wisdom but to live in joy, and make the most of our opportunities.'

'Well, what else have we been doing, my friend, for so many weeks, if not making the most of our opportunities?'

'The opportunities will soon be over, Augustine. These delightful days have nearly fled. Your mother is coming back from Bagn res the day after to-morrow, and I leave for Paris on Sunday.

Ah! this dear house, the house of love which we owe to your uncle's sin! I feel myself quite the niece of that Uncle Adhémar——'

'You will come back here, Fanny?'

'Who knows?'

'You will come back soon, never to leave again, my darling.'

They clasped hands under the table. Their eyes shone in the light of the candles, which flickered in a gentle breeze. And Fanny's adorable face paled a little between the black hair and the violet gown.

'I love you to distraction. When you look at me like that——'

Jacquine removed the cloth. She had heard Augustine's last words; she had surprised the young man's veiled look, the smile, the thrill of love.

'My boy,' she said, 'you know I am going to Little Neauphle till to-morrow, to see my cousin who is staying with my sister, Georgette's mother. As the mare is ill, the cart will take me, and the cart doesn't come back till to-morrow. So——'

'Well—what do you want? You are free. Do as you like,' said Augustine impatiently.

Jacquine's lips worked with silent laughter. Before going she fixed her yellow eyes on the couple who were talking softly to each other.

'I'm going,' she said. 'It's cold this evening. I've laid a fire in the bedroom.'

'It certainly is cold,' said Augustine. 'Come and warm yourself, Fanny. The road will seem long.'

They entered the bedroom. Augustine lighted

the dry twigs which were arranged under large logs, and the bright flame shot up high. A red, mellow light, with dancing reflections, shed its lustre on the greyish woodwork and the curtains of faded silk, whose exquisite shade hovered between tones of pale saffron and dead rose. The circumscribed reflection of the hearth shone on the curved side of the chest of drawers, and on the embossment of the dark bronzes. It shone, too, on Fanny, who stood with her elbow on the marble chimney-piece. The violet of her gown took on a red tinge like that of certain autumn leaves, but her neck and her bent head remained in a warm semi-darkness.

‘Isn’t this comfortable?’ said Augustine. ‘Sit down there, in that easy-chair, and let me rest at your feet, my darling. It is the first time we have sat together at the fireside. Listen to the wind whistling and blowing through the slates. Let’s imagine we are husband and wife.’

‘Alas! we shall have to part directly.’

‘Why do you not want me to go to the “Three Limes” nowadays?’

‘Because I love this summer-house—because here the memory of me surrounds you more completely, and leaves you, day and night, the impression that I am present, or near at hand. I say good-bye, but I do not leave you. And in this empty house you feel you are not alone.’

‘Dear, dear Fanny! it is quite true. You seem to be mine at last, during these hours you are with me—wholly mine.’

‘Not *wholly* yours—yet.’

‘Ah! I am happy! I am content!’

Fanny's fingers toyed with the young man's fair hair. He shut his eyes, overpowered by physical rapture at the gentle caress. His arms encircled her waist; his head sought the tender support of her bosom.

'How happy I am!' he repeated.

A delicious warmth suffused his frame, and he could no longer say whether it came from the glowing hearth, or from the woman before it.

The hours passed, fraught with kisses, promises, words of love murmured lip to lip in the almost nuptial intimacy of the room. The fire grew low. The candles burnt down. And behind the shutters the wind blew furiously. Slates fell from the roof.

The alabaster clock, wreathed with gilt poppies, struck eleven with a shrill tone. Madame Manolé exclaimed:

'Eleven o'clock! I ought to have gone long ago. Quick, my hat and shawl. You won't get back before midnight.'

'Just a minute longer, Fanny!'

'No, it's out of the question. Get up! Love makes you lazy this evening, Monsieur de Chanteprie!'

Augustine rose slowly and regretfully.

'I had still so much to say to you! And I was keeping a surprise, a souvenir for you. Look!'

From a drawer in the chest he took a miniature framed in gold.

'I found it in the loft of this summer-house, between the wall and an old trunk full of books. It is evidently a portrait of the Uncle Adhémar

you are so fond of. He was lying ingloriously in the dust. For how long? Since the First Empire, no doubt. My great-grandmother, the Dutchwoman, banished from her house every little relic of the renegade. The ivory back is cracked. But the picture was pretty, I thought——'

'Very pretty.'

'Well, since it pleases you, keep it.'

'Many thanks, Augustine. I accept it with pleasure. Yes, the picture is pretty, exquisite, expressive, and delicate. But—surely I'm not deceived—this face resembles yours. How extraordinary! I could swear it was your portrait!'

She compared Augustine's face with the rounder, ruddier face which smiled at her from the ivory. The features common to all the Chantepries, the straight nose, and the high forehead, compressed at the temples, marked the relationship between uncle and nephew. Adhémar was Augustine de Chanteprie at the age of twenty-three, a stronger, bolder Augustine, with laughing eyes and expressive lips, his complexion florid under the dust which covered it; an Augustine who did not trouble himself much about the next world.

'He is looking at us,' said Fanny; 'he is looking benevolently at us. Can he be taking me for a niece of Rosalba Rosalind?'

'A mistake which would be insulting both to you and to me, Fanny. Oh! the wind has risen to a perfect tempest! I will go and get a lantern and the garden key.'

He went downstairs. Madame Manolé held the dainty little miniature in the hollow of her hand.

Yes truly the Man of the Poppies seemed to laugh. He would not have let Rosalba Rosalind go out into the black, stormy night, when the dim fire, the drawn curtains, the bed at hand——

Fanny sighed :

‘ Alas, dear uncle, you see the time has not yet come——’

Augustine reappeared, carrying the extinguished lantern.

‘ Such a strange thing has happened, Fanny! All the doors that give access to the road are fastened! The bunch of keys which is hung in the pantry every evening has disappeared. Jacquine must have forgotten, and left it somewhere or other—where, I don’t know. She was in such a hurry to go that she lost her head.’

‘ Well?’

‘ Well, we are prisoners. The carriage entrance is locked, and so is the little door behind the summer-house, and the door of the kitchen-garden too. There is no way out but jumping over the garden wall!’

‘ Much obliged!’

‘ I am more sorry than I can tell you. I beg your pardon a thousand times——’

‘ Try instead to find some way of escape for me!’

‘ There is none!’

‘ You must accomplish the impossible. I can’t stay in your house all night!’

‘ Why not?’

‘ What!—why not, indeed!’

The wind, which had risen to a hurricane, made the vanes on the roof veer about with a grinding

noise and the whole house quiver like a ship in a storm. Augustine exclaimed:

‘All the powers of Nature have joined force with Jacqueline to prevent you from going! Fanny, my dear Fanny, let’s take this adventure in good part. I will yield you my place, and go and sleep in the big house. The bed had clean linen put in this morning; the fire will smoulder under the cinders. You will rest in shelter and without disturbance. There are no ghosts.’

‘How do you know? And what should I do if your Uncle Adhémar and Rosalba Rosalind were to appear in the middle of the night, clad in white shrouds and clanking chains! This house is the house of sin! And besides, what would Jacqueline say?’

‘I can rely on her discretion: Jacqueline loves you as her future mistress. But it’s too bad of you to be thinking of what Jacqueline will say, when a word from you—a yes or no—will give me so much pain or pleasure!’

‘Ah! Monsieur de Chanteprie, you must be falling in love in good earnest, since you take such ideas into your head. You are no Jansenist this evening!’

‘Laugh at me as much as you like, but stay.’

‘You fear nothing for me, nor for yourself?’

‘Of course not—since I am leaving you!’

She sat down again, still hesitating, restrained by an inward, shrinking feeling.

‘You’ll—go away at once?’

‘Oh! you consent, you consent!’ he cried. ‘Yes, my darling, I will obey you, I will go away at once.’

'Well, go! I can hardly keep my eyes open, I am so sleepy. Go now!'

She held out her hand, which he kissed respectfully, as if to reassure her.

'Good-night, Fanny.'

'Good-night. What are you waiting for?'

His aspect had suddenly become mournful.

'Nothing. I'm going. Good-bye.'

He went. The door of the lower hall banged heavily. Drops of rain lashed the window panes.

'What is the matter with me?' thought Fanny. 'I'm on the verge of tears. And Uncle Adhémar is laughing at me. Yet I ought to be happy: I am loved. Ah! how love triumphed this evening! If I had wished——! But, to-morrow, what an awakening! He would have detested me, no doubt.'

The candles, nearly level with their sockets, were flickering their last. Fanny blew out the triple light, and the reddish reflection of the resuscitated fire danced gaily on the curtains, and on the counterpane of the bed—a counterpane of old printed calico representing the tomb of Jean-Jacques. The young woman took off her bodice, then her stays, and bare-shouldered, her bosom untrammelled except by its white drapery, she began to brush her hair.

Suddenly she heard steps on the staircase. Some one was coming up, was knocking at the door of the room. Augustine's voice called:

'Fanny!'

'You! What are you doing? What is the matter?'

'Open the door, I implore you.'

She hastily put up her hair, drew her large shawl round her, and half opened the door.

‘What is the matter with you, Augustine? You frightened me.’

He pushed open the door, and entered the room. He was pale, his hair disordered by the wind, and covered with glistening drops of rain. His dilated eyes burned with a sombre violet flame, and Fanny knew that look—that look of fever and madness, which she had seen before in other eyes.

‘Forgive me, Fanny. I could not go away like that. My heart failed me. I felt I should lose you for ever. I felt I could no longer keep away from you. I roamed the garden in the rain, like a madman. And then I saw the light gleaming between the curtains, I thought of you there behind the wall—so near—so far. And I found myself suddenly at your door, without knowing how I got there.’

She looked at him in silence, and, drawing her shawl more closely across her bosom, said :

‘You must be mad. You are ill. Go away!’

‘Fanny!’

‘If you don’t go, I will!’

It did not occur to him that this was a vain, childish, absurd threat, seeing that all means of exit were closed. He cried :

‘For God’s sake, don’t go, and don’t send me away! Let me just stay in the summer-house, in the next room. I will not stir out of it, my own darling. You will not even be aware of my presence.’

‘Impossible! In a quarter of an hour you would

be knocking at my door, more exacting and more determined than ever. Go, Augustine, for your own sake, for mine.'

'Are you not my betrothed, my wife? Have I not the right to watch over you? Fanny, don't shake your head! Don't turn away from me. I am suffering, I swear to you I am in torment.'

'My poor child!'

'A child, you say? Yes, I was a child when I met you—a simple, fanciful child, dreaming away his life. But your kisses, your terrible kisses, have awakened the man who now cries out to you! Oh! Fanny, what have you done with me? Why can I no longer be content with the crumbs of love which but yesterday made up my joy? I don't know myself. I have neither the will nor the strength to obey you now. I have come back to you, I beseech you to have pity on me, and I refuse to leave you again, Fanny!'

His words of entreaty were uttered in a tone of command that would not be denied. She stammered:

'I have never seen you like this. You frighten me—I will not——'

'I love you! I love you!'

The words of passion came from his lips like a cry, expressing his desire and his right. Fanny drew back in instinctive fear. Yes, indeed, he terrified her, with his pale face, his wild eyes, and his damp hair. He seized her. She struggled blindly, in an involuntary access of prudence and shame. And suddenly her will failed her, her strength gave way. Augustine took possession of

her, kissed her dishevelled hair, her eyelids, her cheeks, her lips. The shawl fell, trembling hands ruffled the laces at her bosom, and—conquered, submissive, her lips against Augustine's—Fanny yielded herself in a kiss so long, so passionate, that their very souls seemed merged in it.

Then he drew away from her, to look at her, at his possession, and the splendour of the woman as she stood revealed, dazzled him. Fanny was standing near the bed, crowned with her black tresses, her eyelids cast down, her bosom bare in the reflection of the clear fire. Dumb—her hands open as if to say, 'Take me'—she forgot her disarray. And, modest in the very simplicity of her abandonment, remembering that she was the first, the initiator, she experienced a feeling at once mysterious and sweet, compounded of pride, shame, tenderness, melancholy, and voluptuousness.

On the chimney-piece, in the semi-darkness, the Man of the Poppies smiled.

XV

'THE carriage is waiting for me,' said Augustine. 'You will forgive my leaving you, mother dear, and make my excuses to our friends.'

Thérèse Angélique replied grimly:

'Four times a year I receive the curate of Hautfort and Captain and Mademoiselle Courdimanche, and the infrequency of these gatherings makes it the more unpardonable of you to miss one. What business can you have in Paris on Christmas evening with people whom you scarcely know?'

'I have told you. I am to be introduced to Monsieur Rennemoulin, the editor of the Catholic Review, *The Oriflamme*.'

'And are you very anxious to meet this Monsieur Rennemoulin?'

'I am.'

'Very well! You are free. At what time will you return?'

'I shall take the half-past ten train.'

'Then the carriage shall go to the station for you. I shall probably sit up late. Don't forget to come to the drawing-room as you pass, to let me know of your return. I am uneasy, my son, uneasy and sad at heart, every time you go to Paris.'

Augustine took his mother's hand to kiss it, and was surprised that it seemed to resist his pressure—

almost indeed to refuse the proffered caress. He looked at Madame de Chanteprie. Upright in her armchair, clothed in her black dress with its white collar, with a crape cap on her smooth grey hair, she was such as he had always seen her, and her bloodless face preserved its usual frigid gentleness. Yet in the depths of her pale eyes there was a sort of dull light, like the faint reflection of some secret emotion.

He left her, vaguely troubled. 'What is the matter with her?' he thought. 'Can she suspect? She sees hardly any one, and surely neither Monsieur Le Tourneur nor the Courdimanches would betray me. If they have no pity for me they would at least spare her. But I did not take the Holy Communion this morning, and that astonished and distressed her. Poor mother!'

He was almost inclined to return to the drawing-room and say, 'I will stay.' But he had already failed to keep two appointments for the sake of pleasing Madame de Chanteprie. Weak alike where his mistress or his mother was concerned, the consciousness of his cowardice, the remembrance of his falsehood, filled him with shame and disgust.

After the supreme crisis of love and desire, after a paroxysm of joy and unspeakable anguish, there remained now an unequal, stormy happiness—times of voluptuous bliss alternating with periods of acute, overwhelming misery. Separated all too soon one from the other, she at Paris and he at Hautfort, both claimed once more by their old ways of living, it was torture to them to await each other and to part from each other; it was torture almost to see each other. Their hearts, by turns exalted and

depressed, wavering like balances out of gear, were never composed and tranquil.

Fanny lived at the corner of the Rue Boissonade and the Boulevard Raspail, facing the Montparnasse cemetery. Her rooms included a studio. Augustine hated the wide boulevard, the building-plots enclosed with palings, the new houses of a crude white, alternating with workmen's hovels. He hated the house, the lobby encumbered with perambulators, the bold face of the *concièrge*. Where were those charming accessories of love—the 'Three Limes,' the autumn forest, the dainty room in the summer-house? On his first visit Augustine could not help saying to Fanny:

'Isn't it torture to you to live here? All your surroundings—both people and things—seem to me unworthy of you.'

She had smiled sadly, and replied:

'The studio is convenient, well lighted, and not expensive. And—I am not rich.'

'I knew that, darling, but I didn't notice it in the country. And, if I could do so without hurting your feelings, I would like——'

'What?'

'Am I not your friend, your lover, the husband of your heart? I would like——'

She laid her hand on his mouth.

'No, you can do nothing: I would not accept anything from you. If we were married and living together, we should have everything in common; but, as it is—I will not, I could not. I must be sufficient to myself, and I shall think myself rich and happy indeed if you love me.'

Never had the boulevard, the house, the lobby, seemed more sordid to Monsieur de Chanteprie than on this gloomy Christmas evening. In the narrow passage which served Fanny as an antechamber, he distinguished hats and piled-up wraps which betrayed the presence of visitors. He was annoyed.

‘So we shan’t be alone? If I had known!—’

‘You would not have come? It’s not kind of you to say so! Come into my room a moment that I may scold you.’

Fanny pushed him into a little room where a night-light was burning, and when the door was shut behind them, continued:

‘Naughty boy! How late you are! You deserve—But here you are, and I forgive you. Kiss me then, you villain!’

She was very pretty in the black sequin gown which enveloped her in rustling, sparkling light. But Augustine took no notice of the dress she had chosen to please him. He said, between kisses:

‘Is Monsieur Rennemoulin here?’

‘Yes. Did you know, then?’

‘I thought I was telling a lie a while ago, when I told my mother I was to meet Monsieur Rennemoulin.’

‘Then now your conscience can be easy.’

‘The guilty intention remains, Fanny dear. It is horrible to have to lie constantly to every one!’

She would have liked to reply: ‘Well! who wants you to lie? Are you not free?’ He continued:

‘Whom have you here besides Monsieur Rennemoulin?’

‘Louise Robert, a charming and unfortunate woman, whose husband was something like mine. He went mad, like mine, and Louise——But I have no right to tell you my friends’ little secrets. You will see also a chum of mine whom you met once at Chêne-Pourpre : George Barral.’

‘The bicyclist in distress?’

‘Himself. He has a brusque, odd manner, but he is an excellent friend. All these people will leave early, I hope, and you with them. But you will come back.’

‘And what about my train?’

‘The train? You will wait for it till to-morrow morning in the arms of your beloved. Oh! don’t say no!’

‘It’s impossible.’

‘Nothing is impossible when one is in love.’

‘I promised my mother I would see her as soon as I got back. She is uneasy——’

‘Oh! you won’t disappoint me like that!’ said Fanny with tears in her voice. ‘We shall scarcely be able to speak to each other. Send a telegram, invent some excuse, and stay——oh! do stay!——my love!’

‘Do you suppose that I shall leave you without a pang? Fanny, be reasonable. You will come to Hautfort the day after to-morrow, and visit the dear summer-house. At three o’clock, won’t you? I will open the little garden-door to you myself. Will you come? Don’t let us stay here any longer. What will your friends think?’

‘I don’t care what they think!’

‘Silly child!’

She gave in with an ill grace, and took Augustine to the studio.

Barral, somewhat amused, welcomed Monsieur de Chanteprie with a courteous phrase, recalling their former meeting at Chêne-Pourpre. Madame Robert and Rennemoulin looked curiously at the new comer. Seated side by side, they were talking with affectionate familiarity—she, fragile and fair, a pretty, somewhat tired-looking woman of the Lamballe type, wearing a muslin fichu on her grey dress, and a black velvet ribbon at her neck; he, well-groomed, his hair cut *en brosse*, his face full and florid, with black eyes, supple chin, and a moustache turned up at the points.

He spoke of his Review, *The Oriflamme*, and said he was getting up a study of Racine's youth.

'I know through our friend, Madame Manolé, that you belong to a Jansenist family,' he said to Augustine. 'One of your ancestors was brought up at the Port-Royal schools. Have you any memoirs or letters which could throw new light on the life of young men at these schools? I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would give me leave to look over any such manuscripts. Madame Manolé almost promised me your co-operation.'

'She was quite right,' said Augustine. 'The friends of Port-Royal are my friends. Come some day to Old Hautfort and I will show you our family treasures, and in particular the letters of Gaston de Chanteprie.'

'I accept the invitation. It is too welcome a one for me to wait to be pressed, although I know I am asking a good deal.'

Fanny rejoiced in her heart. She had invited the editor of the *Oriflamme* to some extent on Madame Robert's account, but much more on Augustine's. Armand Rennemoulin, fluent of speech, witty, a man of the world and an active Catholic, would allay Augustine's scruples. Barral, well drilled beforehand, had promised to keep quiet and not indulge in his usual startling paradoxes and freaks of wit, and thus change the tone of a conversation which Fanny particularly wished to be serious and proper. The poor girl, anxious to distract Augustine and take him out of his gloomy provincial surroundings, had looked about her for suitable people to introduce to him. She moved in that mixed set which is to be found nowhere but in Paris, that set which impinges on every set and which includes artists, men of letters, amateurs of every sort, Bohemians, journalists, intelligent citizens, old ministers, young deputies, perfectly virtuous women, and women who are no better than they should be, men almost illustrious, and men almost disreputable. Fanny, brought up by Jean Corvis in this strange, amusing, and dangerous world, had quitted it to live under the care of the Lassauguettes. She had returned to it by virtue of her marriage. A widow and alone, having no longer a natural protector, she had experienced the spitefulness of women and the sensuality of men. She still paid every winter a few visits to those salons where she met old comrades of her father and her husband, but she resolutely guarded her own door. She received and admitted to intimacy only a little group of friends whose gallantry she

had checked in time. Some of them, artists like herself, young and poor too like herself, had ended by forgetting her sex and treating her as a comrade. Others amused themselves by watching her life with curiosity. Surely such a pretty woman would not live alone till she was fifty? Sooner or later there would be 'some one': who would be the 'some one'? Barral, no doubt. Rich and daring as he was, there was some chance for him. And Jules Rèche, reporter to the *Parisian*, had declared many a time that Barral was 'first favourite.' And Jules Rèche knew women!

Fanny, warmly devoted to her friends, knew the strength and the weakness of each one. Saujon, the landscape painter, had the tongue of a demon and the simple heart of an urchin of Mont Rouge. Coquardeau, the sculptor, the best of men, could not utter half a dozen words without outraging God, his country, his family, and propriety. The elder Bruys, an old artist, schoolfellow of Jean Corvis and formerly a fighter in the Commune, sometimes smelt of drink. Certainly neither Saujon, nor Coquardeau, nor Bruys had been brought up on the knees of the gods. Indeed they had not been brought up at all. They were simple, well-defined characters: education and habits of worldly politeness had not taken the edge off their angles or smoothed down their roughnesses. Fanny liked them as they were in all their picturesque and sometimes even brutal simplicity. But she felt they would excite surprise, disgust, or at least suspicion, in Augustine de Chanteprie's breast if they were suddenly introduced to him.

Accordingly she deliberately erased from her list Saujon, Coquardeau, Bruys, and their like. She intended to let Augustine meet them later on, when he would be better prepared to understand them. There remained Madame Robert, Rennemoulin, and Barral. Fanny had been somewhat inclined to eliminate Barral. But for the last four years he had had a recognised footing under her roof; he never missed any gathering of hers—ready as he always was to oblige Fanny and Fanny's friends. 'He was, or he thought he was in love with me,' reflected the young woman. 'I played the coquette too—but we have become good friends again without any ill feeling or reserve. He has not asked me any indiscreet questions, but he has expressed a wish to make Augustine's acquaintance. That means he accepts the inevitable with a good grace.' Such being the circumstances, how could she avoid inviting Barral? To keep him at a distance would be to show a lack of confidence in him, and to justify all his suspicions.

This Christmas dinner, which brought such diverse characters together, began as well as possible. Augustine grew bolder. He talked with a graceful dignity which delighted Louise Robert. Her look, passing from Monsieur de Chanteprie to Madame Manolé, seemed to say: 'You have chosen well, my dear; he is charming.'

At dessert Rennemoulin launched forth. He deplored the national decadence; he mourned the France of former days, the ancient hierarchy, the grand principle of authority. And, with poetic feeling, he expressed his hatred of the age, and the

longing for solitude which grew stronger each day in his heart.

Madame Robert listened to him somewhat sadly, but Augustine was astonished. What! this well-to-do looking man, clothed by a good tailor, had the soul of a St. Jerome, who, in the midst of Roman luxury, dreamed of the sands of the desert?

But Barral could not help replying :

‘Oh, you are humbugging us, my dear sir! Go to a monastery, live in the country all the year round, like Monsieur de Chanteprie, or—what would be easier and simpler still—shut yourself up in your study. You profess to hate the world; a dozen times a day you cry out upon our rottenness, but every evening you are at the theatre, at dances, or at the houses of lovely women. There are many idealists like you, my dear Rennemoulin, who look with one eye at the new Jerusalem, and with the other—at the Palais-Bourbon. It all ends in marriage and festivities, or in a deputy’s warrant. Look at so-and-so——’

He quoted names with which Augustine was not acquainted. Rennemoulin good-humouredly replied:

‘Barral, you are too outspoken. Your speech is not parliamentary.’

And in a melancholy tone he continued :

‘Yes; I go into the world, and I despise the world. I go into it in order to rally to our cause those whose wills and sympathies are still wavering. But it bores me—oh, horribly!’

‘That’s very creditable to you! But you must acknowledge that your Catholicism is no longer merely a religion, it is a political party.’

'Yes, indeed, it must be!' cried Rennemoulin, somewhat bitterly. If all right-thinking men agitated as I do, you would see a complete reversal of the present order of things at the general elections.'

Augustine thought: 'I might be listening to Monsieur Le Tourneur. Why have I such a repugnance for the Catholics of the salon and the meeting? There is too much rhetoric in Rennemoulin's profession of faith. But I must beware of too hasty a judgment.'

After dinner Rennemoulin said to Fanny:

'You know I must leave you at ten o'clock, dear lady. I am absolutely obliged to go on to the Comtesse de Jouy's. Will you be kind enough to remind Monsieur de Chanteprie that he has promised to come and see me at the office of the *Oriflamme*?'

'I will go, certainly,' said Augustine; 'and you will come to Hautfort?'

'Yes, indeed; and I am sure I shall gain you to our cause. We must not let the socialists take the initiative in bringing about a union between men of intellect and the masses. Let *us* go to the masses! Your place, monsieur, is with us. I will introduce you to our circles, our universities, our co-operators. A quarter past ten! I must fly! Good-bye.'

He shook hands with every one, said a few words in a low tone to Louise Robert, and went.

Whilst Fanny was serving coffee Monsieur de Chanteprie looked at the pictures and ornaments. The walls of the studio were panelled with masks of Genii. The only articles of furniture were a table, some quaint chairs of which no two were alike,

a Norman press, and a sofa with cushions covered in bluish cloth. Here and there were articles of pottery or copper, engravings, unframed studies, notices of various kinds, and, on a bracket, some little figures by Tanagra and a group by Rodin.

Augustine could not help a certain feeling of discomfort while examining the details of this typical artist's room. Shuddering, he passed an eighteenth-century print, a 'Shepherdess' after Fragonard, and the 'Lost Women' of Rodin. How could Madame Manolé endure the sight of these objects which Augustine frankly termed obscenities—filth? Fanny, by allowing such a display of indecencies, seemed to invite men to treat her with disrespect. How many times had Monsieur de Chanteprie begged her to remove the offending works of art? But Fanny—who had sacrificed her bicycle to what she called her lover's 'prudishness'—Fanny was almost annoyed: 'Those!—obscenities, filth? Why, they are admirable! Art justifies everything. You must have a very impure imagination, my friend.'

After that, Augustine struggled against a temptation to destroy, by an intentional act of clumsiness, the shameless 'Shepherdess' and the intertwined females, whom he could not look at without disgust.

Madame Robert approached. They talked. She was one of those women, graceful rather than beautiful, sensible rather than intelligent, who please at the second glance. She spoke of Rennemoulin with restrained admiration, and of Barral with unaffected horror.

'I don't suppose you attach any importance to

his speeches. Wretched man! He respects nothing. He is a materialist.'

She pronounced the word in a mysterious tone, which betrayed her inward misgivings. And again she began to praise Rennemoulin, until Monsieur de Chanteprie, in spite of himself, could not but guess the young woman's secret. What! A married woman? Was it possible that Rennemoulin, a worthy man and a good Catholic——?

A violent ring at the bell, followed by the irruption of a noisy band of people, interrupted Madame Robert's eulogies. Three young men, an old one, and a woman entered the studio. One of them shouted:

'Saujon has come back from Normandy! he's coming! he's coming! Here's Saujon! He's bringing sausages, pudding, a pie, and some mistletoe—mistletoe from his mother-in-law's! We've come to give you a surprise, Madame Manolé! We're bringing the wherewithal for a junketing. We want your hospitality till midnight. Is it all right?'

'Shut up, Coquardeau,' said Saujon. 'Can't you see there are visitors? Good evening, Fanny, I haven't seen you since the spring, so I gave myself leave to come. But I see I've put my foot in it!'

'No, indeed,' said Fanny gently; 'you are welcome.'

She added in an undertone:

'Behave yourself, Saujon. We are not among chums this evening.'

She introduced Saujon, Rèche, Coquardeau, and

Bruys to Madame Robert, still scared by the sudden invasion.

Saujon at first adopted a stiffness of demeanour which was positively British. He had long hair and a small forked beard, and he wore a velvet waistcoat, a velvet jacket, and very wide velvet trousers, in cut like those of a navvy. His wife, a thin woman with smooth hair, retreated to a corner where no one took any notice of her. The elder Bruys, an old white-haired man with a gentle, apostolic countenance, poured himself out a small glass of brandy. Saujon described his stay in Normandy, at his mother-in-law's house. The sculptor Coquardeau, a man with a big black beard, who looked like a peasant—but a peasant with plenty of character—gazed lovingly at the sculptured group of women by Rodin.

'No, I ought not to say so, but I was bored to death!' concluded Saujon. 'And you, my dear friend, are you flourishing? You're looking rather pale! Come now, before beginning the evening's amusements, you must show us your studies.'

'My studies? Ah! my poor Saujon! I have done nothing, or next to nothing; half a dozen worthless pastels. Ask Barral!'

'What! you must be joking, my dear friend! You clear out in the spring, saying: "I'm going to surprise the secrets of that beggar—Nature." And then—nothing! What have you been doing, then?'

'What about yourself?'

'Heaps of little things. And now I'm beginning a big decorative panel, making use of my summer studies. A perfectly astonishing subject! A meadow,

willows—green willows—but such a green! No, it can't be reproduced! A greyish-green, with a delicate silver bloom on it! You know it, Coquardeau, the green of the willows at four o'clock in the morning?'

Coquardeau replied:

'It's wonderful!'

'And then, above, a daybreak sky, a misty sky the colour of mother-o'-pearl, a Corot sky—and under this sky, in the meadow, before the willows, a naked girl and boy, playing together after the morning bath. Oh, Coquardeau, such a girl! isn't she?'

Coquardeau replied:

'Wonderful!'

'I've unearthed a little model, whom I had down there, at my mother-in-law's. Oh, my children! such a scandal! The old woman would never let me pose the child in her meadow—a meadow where no one ever comes. But if you only knew what a pretty lass it is! Fifteen years old—a slender, yet developed bosom—I must give you her address, Fanny!'

'No, give it to me!' cried the tall Rèche, who was talking in a corner to Barral.

Coquardeau was no longer listening; he took up the little group by Rodin, placed it and replaced it to make the shadows play on it. His large fingers caressed, tenderly and delicately, the curving hips, the projecting shoulder-blades, and the lightly suggested heads of the two women. At last he put the group back again on the bracket, and said once more:

‘Wonderful!’

By now they were all talking at once, and Monsieur de Chanteprie listened and looked on, seated in the shadow, at the end of the sofa. A warmer and more vibrant atmosphere seemed to pervade the studio, an atmosphere in which ideas and images broke forth, illuminated their surroundings, and then disappeared like flashes of lightning in a stormy sky. Words, spoken in a loud tone, would rise above a momentary silence, then the unfinished speech would become lost in the buzz of conversation. ‘Atmosphere—decomposition of tone—Degas—Monet.’ It was Fanny and Saujon who were talking. ‘Proletariat—misery—harmony.’ This from Coquardeau, who had drawn a paper from his pocket, and was reading an anarchist manifesto to Bruys. ‘Symbolism—ruins of Parnassus.’ That was Rèche, telling Barral the details of some literary research. This company of people did not talk of money, or women, or the little events of their daily lives. They seemed to care for nothing but art, literature, or politics. And, by an odd contrast, their feelings were expressed in whimsical paradoxes; the slang of the studios and the boulevards lent a mocking tone to their sincere enthusiasm and indignation. One uttered folly in a grave tone; another spoke of touching and serious things in a jesting manner.

Like the true provincial he was, Monsieur de Chanteprie had looked on them at first as talkative, shallow Parisians, who could not be taken seriously. But gradually he perceived the character of each one revealing itself. Saujon proudly confessed to

the joyous poverty and ardent faith of the artist. A dream of universal justice dwelt under the energetic brow of Coquardeau and the weary brow of Bruys. Rèche was the needy man of fashion, the clever Proteus, who sees everything, knows everything, and ruthlessly tracks down realism in every nook and corner of Paris. Barral was the voluptuous dilettante, ready to extract pleasure from everything. Fanny Manolé and Louise Robert were the dark Eve and the fair Eve—they represented Love. And they all thrilled with a life made a hundred times fuller by contact with other lives; they all bore the echo of an immense turmoil, the reflection of an immense fire. How unmistakably they belonged to their age and their country! Through them, by means of them, Augustine got a glimpse of a whole unknown world of labour, suffering, joy, of millions of beings engaged in a desperate struggle for glory, for fortune, for their scanty daily bread. He seemed to see the thoughtful people of the schools and the laboratories, the colourless people of the faubourgs, the brilliant people of the salons and the pleasure-resorts—all contemporary Paris, that which the Church brands with a significant name: 'The Age.'

And among these men and women Monsieur de Chanteprie experienced the nervous awkwardness of a traveller wandering in a strange country, among people with whose customs he is unacquainted, and whose language he does not understand. What was there in common between him and them? Not a single mode of thought or feeling. They did not even recognise the same law. They had not the same reason for existence.

And they were his fellow-countrymen, his contemporaries, his brethren, Christians bought by the blood of Christ, laved in the waters of baptism. Had they any care for their souls? Did they look upon the welfare of these immortal souls as their only rule of conduct? Did they ever think of the eternity of happiness or of torture which awaited them? Did they even know that they had souls?

No. The horizon of their earthly life bounded their sight and their desires. Rennemoulin spoke well of duty and religion, but was Rennemoulin's Catholicism aught but a literary attitude, a political theory, a stepping-stone to power and success? Did not Rennemoulin belong to the category of rationalist neo-Catholics, who would fain preserve the moral theory of Christianity while neglecting its dogmas and dispensing with its practical side? He held meetings, he did not pray.

'I am alone! I am alone!' thought Augustine sorrowfully, and his depression of spirit gave him an air of shy timidity. Fanny, who was in despair, vainly endeavoured to rouse him by her looks. He uttered only a few monosyllables, and took refuge in the shadow. And he felt a sort of resentment against the woman who had drawn him from his solitude, and for love of whom he had gone to this place. To her too, in her house, he was an alien.

XVI

ONE o'clock was striking when Monsieur de Chanteprie's carriage traversed the deserted streets of Hautfort. All was silence and darkness. In the light of the two carriage-lamps, the old houses with their high windows and their little iron balconies, the infrequent signboards, the gloomy shops standing back from the roadway, the bare trees rising up from behind the low walls, the white telegraph-posts, the church porch, Count Godefroy's hospital—one after another each object appeared, then disappeared, swallowed up by the gloom. The rain poured down incessantly.

Near the municipal garden Augustine gave the reins to the manservant, and, by way of taking a short cut, followed the path (impassable for carriages) which led up almost to the door of the house. Behind him both town and plain were buried in a black gulf. But the young man felt the welcome presence of that which he could not see. In this desolate spot, and on this gloomy night, among the lifeless trees and ruins, he breathed, his heart was lighter. He was no longer alone.

Those recollections of the evening which had occupied his mind during the journey were now but a confused memory. He was tired, and very drowsy. Half asleep he entered the house, and proceeded to the drawing-room, where his mother was awaiting

him. She was alone at the fireside, sitting under the lamp, which gave forth a feeble light. She watched his approach in silence.

'I lost the half-past ten train, mother,' he began. 'It was good of you to send the carriage back for me, but why did you sit up so late? You——'

'I would have sat up for you all night,' said Thérèse-Angélique. 'But I was not sure that you could bring yourself to leave your—entertainer.'

'But I promised you.'

'Oh yes! You are faithful to your promises. You are a dutiful son. You never lie, do you?—never!'

He stood dumb, motionless, in the middle of the room, in his rain-soaked garments, and he was so worn-out with fatigue that the whole scene seemed to him a sort of nightmare.

'You don't answer! Be it so! Why should you lie again, as you lied yesterday and to-day? I know all, my son, I know all.'

Augustine trembled, and looked at his mother aghast.

'Yes; I know all. I let you go this evening, that I might be free to question Monsieur Le Tourneur and the Courdimanches; and I waited for you to tell you the sorrow—and the contempt—I feel. Oh! you are a first-rate liar! One can see that you have been well taught. And it was not Monsieur Forgerus who instructed you in the truly feminine art of lying. All your piety—a lie! Your filial love—a lie! Your acts, words, looks—all lies! But you are unmasked. I have said what I had to say. Go back to your mistress! Go!'

She spoke without emphasis, in a low, clear voice, which betokened inflexible determination. Augustine's face worked with feeling.

'Since you know all,' said he, 'you will perhaps forgive me. Oh! I don't pretend to deny or excuse my fault. I confess my weakness, and the lies of which I am ashamed. Yes; I love a woman with a love which has been my undoing, and which has already caused me suffering. But you know—they must have told you—how it came about—the delusion I was under. Alas! I was taken in my own snare! The thought of this may make you less severe. You will pity me——'

She shook her head. No; she could not understand, she could not pity. Chaste among the chaste, a virgin yet at heart, marriage and maternity had only inspired Thérèse Angélique with an invincible repugnance for 'the work of the flesh.' She saw in love only a base and contemptible function—the mark of the beast, which even the holy sacrament of marriage could hardly efface.

'So you are just like other men—you—my son—on whom God's favours have been bestowed even from your birth! Ah! you are indeed far more guilty than other men, and more contemptible too, seeing that you were better prepared against temptation! Your Christian education had armed you against the devices of the devil, and yet you sinned through pride and self-sufficiency; you played a blasphemous comedy, to deceive a credulous priest and two old people. Oh yes—I know—your good intentions made everything right! You brought casuistry to your aid. To sin for the greater glory

of God is not to sin at all! The man is excusable who braves temptation and falls into unchastity in the effort to save a soul! Verily a strange and convenient maxim! Religion became the contemptible pretext for your fall. You disguised your despicable pleasures under an appearance of religious zeal. Pharisee! Do you think you can lie to God?’

He did not answer. What sophism could he bring forward in answer to such words? The sensation of nightmare continued. Where was he? Whose were the gloomy faces that peered forth at him from the walls? A woman—pale and terrible—was speaking to him. His mother? No, it was his Race, betrayed by his sin, come forth to judge him, and to curse him. The dead took form and voice, and recalled to his mind their example, their voluntary exile, the persecutions they had endured, the holy mission handed down by them from generation to generation.

He turned to his mother, and said in a voice of sorrowful humility:

‘I have nothing to say. I know you are outraged, and—alas!—God more than you! I blame myself far more than you can do. But what are your wishes? Am I to leave this house? Is my presence intolerable to you?’

‘You are of age and free. The house belongs to you. I hoped to die in it. But the moment you bring that creature here, I go—to die—no matter where.’

Augustine replied sadly:

‘You do us an injustice—both her and me. What-

ever happens you will be sole mistress here, and your wishes will be complied with. But, since we are speaking of her, oh! for the last time, let me assure you that she is not responsible for—for what has occurred. They have slandered her, no doubt——'

'*They*—that is, the Abbé Le Tourneur, who knows her well?'

'The Abbé Le Tourneur may well be angry with me. But why with her? She has done nothing. She is an erring soul, but she is not vile. I cannot let her be credited with evil intentions of which she is incapable. Her only crime has been to love me but too well.'

'You dare to speak of her to me—to me!' exclaimed Madame de Chanteprie. 'A worthless woman, an adventuress! Do you expect me to distinguish between a prostitute and such a woman as she?'

'You are speaking of a woman whom you don't know, whom you hate unjustly. She does not deserve to be treated with such severity. If you yourself were to read her heart, you could not but pity her.'

'She is in my eyes the instrument of your perdition. Truly her power for evil must be immense, to have changed you so rapidly and so completely! Let us drop the subject, my son. I forbid you ever to speak to me of her again. And remember this: even if you try to deceive me with a feigned repentance, even if she herself should be truly converted, never, with my consent, never shall you marry this woman—never!'

‘You are merciless, but God will forgive me.’

‘To obtain His forgiveness you must expiate your sin.’

‘You drive me to despair.’

‘Your damnation or your salvation rests with yourself. I shall still pray for you; it is all I can do. There is nothing more to be said. Leave me!’

Augustine made a supplicating gesture, but Madame de Chanteprie turned away her head. He went.

When he reached his room, his first stupor had passed away, and he began to realise the consequences of this scene. His mother was lost to him, and Fanny no longer shared his inmost thoughts. He was alone and broken-hearted.

Then his strength gave way. He became once more a little child—frightened, miserable. On his knees, his arms extended to the pitiless spectre which cast him off, he sobbed:

‘Mother! Oh, mother!’

XVII

THE rain spread over everything a veil of mist, broken only by the skeleton poplars. As far as the eye could see, the highroad, paved at one side only, wound along between rows of elms and dull green banks.

Crouching under the hood of the cab, Fanny was listening to Augustine's account of the scene of the night before last. He had preferred not to receive her at Hautfort that day; so he had gone to meet her at the station, and they were driving by a circuitous route to Chêne-Pourpre.

'I can understand your being a good deal upset,' said Fanny; 'but you mustn't take the thing too tragically. One could easily foresee that your friends would betray us, to satisfy their own consciences. Your mother will sulk for a few weeks, then, one fine day, she'll fall into your arms.'

'Ah, you don't know my mother!'

'She's an intelligent woman; she has been married, and must have had some experience of life—and she loves you. Can she possibly condemn you to her perpetual displeasure, simply because you have done what all young men do? Did she hope to keep you a celibate and a martyr for ever? You have a mistress: well, what harm?'

'Fanny, you speak very thoughtlessly. It was

my duty and my wish to marry that mistress. But now my mother refuses her consent to our marriage. My poor Fanny, our relations, which shock no one in your world, are in the eyes of Hautfort a disgraceful scandal.'

'But your mother, and the good people of Hautfort, ought to realise that I am not a living menace to your future, and that this connection, this "disgraceful scandal," will, necessarily, be—provisional.'

'What do you mean?'

'You will never marry me. Ah! perhaps, if you were another man! But could even love itself make a rebel of you?'

'How?'

'Could you marry me in spite of your mother?'

'No.'

'Not even if you thought Madame de Chanteprie's opposition unjust, absurd, foolish?'

'Not even then. But in the present case, Fanny, I do not think my mother's opposition either unjust, absurd, or foolish. I regret it, but—I cannot but approve it.'

'Oh!'

'My mother looks on marriage from a Christian standpoint. She regards it as a sacrament, as a solemn, serious union of two souls, whose aim will be to spiritually strengthen and succour each other. She would accept a daughter-in-law without birth and without fortune——'

'But not without honour? Yes; in the eyes of Madame de Chanteprie and your friends I am no longer "an honest woman."'

'My mother and my friends are just as severe in

their judgment of me as of you. The man who profits by a woman's weakness is no less guilty than the woman who falls.'

'It's very good of your mother and your friends not to accuse me alone of—of—seduction. Make your mind easy, Augustine, I will never encourage you in any rebellious act. I don't want either your name or your fortune, and I didn't give myself to you by way of a matrimonial speculation.'

'Fanny, your sarcasm wounds me. Nothing is changed between us. I am as I was before.'

She sighed.

'Fanny, there is a feeling of doubt underlying your taunts. Tell me your whole thought: do you think I shall cease to love you some day?'

'I think—you will return to your duty, for you are a man of duty, law, and order. You suffer from remorse already. In your eyes, as in your mother's, love is a sin.'

'Yes; love is a sin. God's commandment is explicit. But I could not promise my mother to give you up. I am near you, dear; I suffer with you; I love you more than before.'

She turned away her eyes, which were full of tears.

'I ought to have foreseen this change in your feelings. I was not prudent—because I loved you. Men like you cannot forgive a mistress for having yielded herself too readily. When the woman is sincere, makes no resistance, and has no regard for the future, they think: "She complies too easily. I have had her; perhaps another will have her."'

'Oh, my poor Fanny, we are not in a condition

to understand each other! You wound me, and I wound you. Let's talk of something else.'

She was silent. And what could they say without risking some word which would lay bare the eternal antagonism of their minds? There would be between them in future a perpetual misunderstanding, a quarrel liable to be renewed at any moment. No, they were not of the same race; they did not speak the same language. Their love, which brought them together during their brief moments of passion, left them afterwards with confused feelings of shame and alienation.

At the 'Three Limes' everything was changed. Dead leaves had collected in the courtyard; the hinges of the shutters grated unpleasantly; the unsubstantial furniture and flowered hangings wore a faded, chilly, melancholy look.

Whilst Monsieur de Chanteprie was taking his horse to Testard's, Fanny lay on the cane couch. She was cold; she wanted to cry. And she did shed tears when she heard the click of the gate. How many times in the bright sunny room had she risen joyfully at the sound which announced a visit from Augustine! In those days the warm air wafted in through the open window the odour of grass and of roses. Giddy wasps buzzed against the luminous texture of the curtains. Along the little path through the grass Augustine came, smiling as he advanced. He entered Fanny's house—and Fanny's heart. Yes, as each day passed he absorbed her more and more, and she rejoiced in her enthrallment. Alas! the lovers would never again know the sweet sufferings of hope deferred, the long-expected meet-

ings, the sensation of ecstasy, and of being bound for a realm of mysterious happiness.

Augustine returned.

'You are cold, dear. There are sticks in the woodshed. Shall I light a fire?'

He went and got dead branches and some large logs. The flames shot up; lights and shadows quivered on the ceiling and walls, and the wandering reflections, together with the young man's attitude, evoked other memories. Fanny saw again the room of the poppies, and the bed bathed in crimson light. How Augustine had loved her that evening!

Never again—no—never again!

She hugged her grief; she drove the iron into her soul. And Augustine, seated beside her, raised her veil and kissed her tear-filled eyes.

'You are crying. Are you angry with me?'

She dared not reply, conquered as she was by the sweetness of having those lips against her eyelids. And he, too, lost his self-control, forgot his scruples, was only a man in a woman's arms. Her hat fell; her wraps slipped off.

'You love me, then?'

'Don't speak!'

He seized her in his arms.

'No; do just set my mind at rest, console me. I'm so miserable!'

'Don't speak!'

His tone was that of a master, and the woman no longer gainsaid him; love had reduced her to slavery.

XVIII

'DON'T speak!' For many a long day Fanny remembered that entreaty, that command, of Augustine's.

'Ah!' she thought, 'how he has changed, he who but now was wont to say: "Speak to me. The sound of your voice is sweet as a caress." Why does he no longer wish to hear the words that come to my lips when he kisses me? Why does he silently enfold me, as if to reserve his secret thoughts, as if to keep his inmost soul from me? Alas! he is coming to himself all too quickly. His averted eyes, his silent lips! He says to me: "Shall we sleep?" But he does not sleep. I can hear him sighing in the darkness—sad, and far away from me in thought. And I dare not say to him: "What is the matter?" so much do I dread his reply.'

She was dreaming thus one evening in the studio when Barral arrived. He had a box for the Vaudeville. Fanny excused herself from accompanying him. She was tired—she had nothing to wear—the light and the noise gave her a headache.

'That's all nonsense. There's something else.'

'No, indeed.'

'You have been crying, Fanny.'

She denied it, then confessed she had, but only

over trifles. To-morrow things would seem all right; but she was not equal to going out.

‘Then I shall stay,’ said Barral. ‘You are depressed, and crying, and you think I’ll leave you like that? I know my duty as a friend, and I shall stay.’

Fanny could not help smiling, and she felt somewhat comforted by his cheerful voice and frank look.

‘Now you are going to tell me why you are moping all by yourself.’

‘My friend, I have done nothing or next to nothing for a whole year. I went into the country with my mind made up to work hard and do my very best, and I returned empty-handed. I have just been able to pay my rent, and now I have to wear my old clothes, and economise in light and fuel.’

She took the little saucepan full of boiling water off the spirit-lamp and filled the teapot. Barral watched her closely.

‘You are pale and thin. And why? Because of money matters? No, indeed, there is something else amiss. Put down the teapot; you are trembling, you will break it. Sit down by me. You are blushing! My dear Fanny, it’s very wrong of you to keep your trouble from me. I can read your eyes and your heart like a book, and the moment I saw you again——’

‘George!’

‘Come, I won’t ask for a confession which might be too embarrassing for you. But if you are unhappy—and you are!—if the burden on your heart is

greater than you can bear, if you want a true friend, a confidant——'

'And a consoler—you are there. Much obliged. I know the kind of consolation you are ready to offer me!'

There was a gleam of resentment in Barral's grey eye.

'My dear friend, look at me; do I look like a piqued, disappointed man meditating revenge? I should of course be delighted to console you, but I don't offer you my consolations just now, because—wrongly enough—you would look on them as an affront to your feminine dignity. Indeed you would think that I despise you, or else that I can't have much pride. And, besides, you have a grudge against me.'

'What for?'

'Because I am not dead, or dying, or driven to despair through your having refused my love.'

'Your love!'

'Yes, Fanny, my love. I loved you, and perhaps I love you still, with a tender, steadfast, enlightened, and indulgent affection—an affection which, however, would not go to the length of murder or suicide——'

'Or marriage——'

'—Or marriage. I don't admit your right to upset my whole life without good reason—since we could be happy with a minimum of scandal. And besides, I don't admit your right to hate me, or blame yourself, just because my proposal happened to displease you, and you have entered into a contract with another man. I am sorry, Fanny,

but I'm not angry—and I have no foolish jealousy—or very little! You are free; you can dispose as you think fit of your heart and your person, without in any way destroying my friendship and esteem for you. So you may have every confidence in me.'

'But I have nothing to tell you.'

'Why should you be ashamed of loving—Monsieur de Chanteprie? There, I have called him by his name! And it's quite easy to deduce your story. He tried to convert you, but instead of that you half-converted him. And now remorse is having its innings. You are Sin, Damnation, the Scarlet Woman——'

'Don't laugh, George! Don't laugh at what makes me so miserable.'

'It's true, then? You are forsaken and unhappy?'

'Forsaken—perhaps. Unhappy—certainly. Since you have guessed everything, I won't pretend any longer. Yes; I love Augustine de Chanteprie, I love him passionately—I adore him. And I am terrified——'

'But he loves you?'

'Ah!' she said, 'I don't know what Augustine calls *love*.'

She began to talk, pleased on the whole that Barral had forced her confidence. She told the strange story of her love. He listened, shaking his head, and giving vent to brief exclamations.

'Yes—I know—I can see the man. A mystic, living in the unknown, for whom the realities of life do not exist. He has all the virtues, my poor little girl, but he only uses them as a weapon for your destruction. Come, my poor Fanny, let's

argue it out: why do you love this Monsieur de Chanteprie?’

‘I love him because I love him.’

‘Yes, of course! But what do you prefer in him?—his charms of mind or of body? If your lover’s blue eyes, fair hair, and youthful graces appeal to you first and foremost—why then, you need not care a hang for his outlandish Jansenism and his scruples, so long as you are not tired of his kisses. But supposing you cannot make this convenient distinction between his physical and moral person? Then—that’s Love itself—Love with a capital L. In which case your state is more serious. You are the victim of a sentimental illusion which must be destroyed. Ah! In the name of fortune, what possessed you to get into such a scrape, my poor Fanny?’

He lighted a cigarette at the lamp, and, standing in front of the young woman, continued:

‘You have just depicted Monsieur de Chanteprie as a very fine character, and I don’t gainsay you. He is noble, he is loyal, he is sublime; he has every good quality, and only one fault: he is dead. Yes, indeed, you tell me yourself that you have made every effort to withdraw him from the tomb in which—poor fool!—he fancies he *lives*. Rash woman! you have united yourself to a corpse. You won’t succeed in restoring him to life, and you yourself will perish by inches in his embrace. Already you dare not think or speak freely, or read books of which Monsieur de Chanteprie disapproves, or admire masterpieces which he does not understand, or love what he contemns. And it’s all because

you're a woman—and very much of a woman. Yes, woman, through a natural or acquired instinct, longs to be absorbed and to lose herself entirely in the beloved one. Fortunately, your unusual education has not over-developed this instinct in you—an instinct which is the mark of weakness and servitude. Your free, strong nature has an invincible repugnance for that kind of suicide, and your determination to lead a free and independent mental life survives in spite of love, and in opposition to love. Any woman—no matter who—brought up in the orthodox feminine way, will adopt unquestioningly the ideas and beliefs of a man with whom she is very much in love. But you—although you want to give yourself body and soul—you'll find that you will recover your mental equilibrium in spite of yourself.'

'Oh! don't say that!'

'Well then, begin that absurd attempt at conversion over again. Mortify yourself, deaden your faculties with the muttering of prayers. You will only become a poor loving fool, and never a saint. And besides, whatever you do, your Jansenist will despise you.'

'Why?'

'Because you are Love, Fanny! you are Sin, the visible form of Lust—I am surprised that Monsieur de Chanteprie does not hate you in the depths of his heart. But mark my words: if he is overcome with remorse at having offended God and his pious mother, he won't hesitate to sacrifice you.'

She did not reply immediately. Her brow was knitted in a frown. Her elbow on her knee, and

her chin on her hand, she looked fixedly at the pattern of the carpet.

‘You are angry?’

She answered slowly:

‘I am not angry; I am frightened. But I cannot, I will not believe you. I will give up neither my love nor my hope. George, you have desired women; some you have appreciated more than others—regarded them with a more delicate tenderness. And so you think you have loved! I, who am not without experience in the hearts of men—I tell you that you have no idea of what true love is——’

‘Because I don’t rhapsodise? Because I am a sensible, well-balanced, healthy man, and not a hero of melodrama?’

‘Because you are, above all, an egotist, my dear Barral. You can’t forget yourself; you are incapable of a spontaneous impulse, a disinterested sacrifice, or an act of folly. You invest your sentimental capital with the utmost prudence, and you calculate just how much income it will bring you in. You haven’t the youthfulness of heart and freshness of feeling which attract women. Those who don’t believe in God, my friend, make love their religion, for we all want to adore some one or something—a lover or a child, if we haven’t a God.’

‘Let’s admit, with Joseph Prudhomme, that women want a religion!’

‘Yes, indeed, the religion of love. That suffices to fill our lives. Do you imagine I am happy, living alone, like a bachelor? The normal woman—the sort of woman I believe myself to be—neither

pious nor depraved—can only find happiness in loving and in giving herself to the loved one. However completely she may be emancipated from old-fashioned beliefs and outworn prejudices, she has an invincible repugnance for the kind of love you offer me, George—the kind of love Chamfort calls——’

“The union of two bodies, and the gratification of a double attraction.” How moral you are this evening, my dear Fanny! You astonish me. But you speak glibly enough of “women—all women.” Let’s speak simply of Madame Manolé. For I have known women—and those not by any means of a commonplace sort—who were quite willing to accept the kind of love I offered them.’

‘But what did you say just now?—that women long to lose themselves entirely in the beloved one! Now I have caught you in the very act of contradicting yourself! You may be sure that the women you speak of—“not by any means of a commonplace sort”—had aspired to the only lasting, satisfying sort of love—but without success. You may be sure that, though out of weariness or a desire for forgetfulness or revenge, they fell in with your voluptuous plans, they yet preserved in their hearts a bitter regret for their first dream.’

‘You mean that to love a man like me is to fall.’

‘Yes—to fall; to descend from love to libertinage.’

‘So if Monsieur de Chanteprie were to abandon you, knowing about me—knowing that I want you and am waiting for you—if he almost threw you—maddened and reckless—into my arms—you consider you would “fall,” if you loved me?’

‘If I gave myself—yes: for now it is impossible that I should ever love you——’

‘And, rather than “fall,” you would resign yourself to living alone, like a nun, with the memory of Monsieur de Chanteprie?’

‘Certainly!’

‘Well, my dear, we shall see! But I know you, imaginative and impulsive as you are—capable of desperate deeds! Still I admire you: you are grand as a lover—wonderful! I admire you and I pity you. You will suffer.’

‘I suffer already.’

‘It distresses me to know that you are unhappy; it pains me. I want to see you pretty, happy, gay! Don’t get plain-looking, Fanny, don’t be dull! My incurable egotism is involved in your happiness.’

She could not help laughing.

‘Well, I found you weeping, and I leave you smiling.’

‘You are such a queer person, irritating and amusing at the same time—and, all the same, a first-rate friend!’

I would have been more, and better, than a friend, if you had been willing,’ he replied. ‘Ah! Fanny, why did Monsieur de Chanteprie interfere between us? No, don’t be angry! I’m not going to say anything, but I think none the less——’

XIX

AUGUSTINE had not seen his mother again. Mademoiselle Cariste—compromised as she was in the 'scandal'—had shut her door against him, saying: 'You have deceived us; you have made us the accomplices of your debauchery. I cannot receive you in future. You are not to come back to us until you have made your peace with God.' And the whole clan of pious women, pitying the sainted mother, cried out on the unnatural son, who was 'imperilling his salvation with a wicked woman.'

The captain alone remained on Augustine's side. He alone cast no stone at the 'wicked woman.' And Augustine dreaded the pitying and imploring sadness, the exquisite gentleness of the old man, more even than the contempt of respectable people, more than the taunts of the vulgar. Incapable of giving up an erring soul as lost, and instinct as he was with Christian charity, old Captain Courdimanche took no account of the terrifying dogmas which had such a hold over Augustine. It was with difficulty that he could bring himself to admit the existence of hell, and to acquiesce in the doctrine of eternal punishment. In his anxiety to preserve the sinner from the supreme sin, which is despair, he unceasingly pointed him to a welcoming Christ ready with open arms to receive the prodigal son and the labourer

who has worked only one hour. His simple exhortations moved Monsieur de Chanteprie to tears. They awoke in him the memory of departed joys, a regret for the forbidden sacraments, and an obscure feeling which included all the others: a longing for God.

The young man sought distraction. He read books lent him by Fanny, as well as some of those works of philosophy and science which Monsieur Forgerus called 'monuments of human pride.' But he attacked them without preparation or method, and could not understand them. The other books—poems and novels—roused in him antagonism of mind and feeling. He read no more. Then, not knowing what to do, he bethought himself of the promise he had made Rennemoulin. He invited the editor of the *Oriflamme* to examine the manuscripts in his library. Rennemoulin seemed delighted.

'We were made to know each other,' he said to Monsieur de Chanteprie. 'I shall go on begging and entreating you, until you give in and are enrolled in our circle. Here you are a wasted force. In our ranks you will be a valuable defender of the Church.'

'The curate of Hautfort used to say the same, without convincing me. Don't deceive yourself: I am an ignoramus, a savage, a recluse—a coward perhaps. I don't understand politics. Forms of government are nothing to me. Jean and Gaston de Chanteprie were good royalists; Adhémar de Chanteprie dreamed of universal brotherhood; and Jacques de Chanteprie sat in the Constituent

Assembly, with the Abbé Gregory. As for myself, I fear to connect religion with politics, and I am convinced that example is the best form of proselytism. Let us try to live as Christians——'

'Yes,' said Rennemoulin, laughing; 'but it's easy enough to see that you don't understand anything of politics. The socialists are finding their way to the hearts of the people. Let us imitate their methods, while combating their doctrine. Let us go to the people. If we do not direct their intellectual education, they will get educated without us and in opposition to us.'

'You want apostles—and you have only advocates. And, besides, I don't like the spirit and tone of such propagandist papers as Monsieur Le Tourneur's. If the Gospel cannot teach morality to the masses—who know nothing of it—do you think papers like the *Rambolittain Cross* will succeed any better? With all my heart I want the Kingdom of God to come, but I don't think the Assumptionists will hasten its advent.'

'My dear sir, the editors of the papers you refer to have not the genius of Pascal, but you would not put his *Provinciales* into the hands of such people as read the *Cross*?'

'I am certainly a worthless recruit. You will get nothing out of me.'

'We shall see.'

After Rennemoulin's departure Monsieur de Chanteprie was astonished at himself, for having dared to speak as he had.

'Inconsistent Pharisee that I am! If Rennemoulin only suspected the secret of my life, he

would look on me as an impostor. Alas! what a wide difference there is between my mind—impregnated with Christianity—and my heart—a prey to carnal love!

He went to see Rennemoulin the following week. Together they visited the Catholic workmen's club established in the Rue Cardinal-Lemoine. Before the gathering of the evening, they partook, in the 'Temperance Restaurant,' of a 'wholesome, economical, and pleasant meal, with tea, coffee, lemonade, and other non-alcoholic beverages.' Then they went up to the first floor, where were the workroom, lecture-hall, and museum.

'The workmen meet here to read and study,' said Rennemoulin; 'but of course we don't put all kinds of works at their disposal. One of our friends has the task of distributing books and papers—a delicate mission, demanding much tact and circumspection. A few eminent men, lay or clerical, are present at all our meetings. They are the counsellors and mentors of our workmen-friends, and are always ready with advice, instruction, or guidance.'

Monsieur de Chanteprie began to reproach himself for his unfounded mistrust.

He looked at the crucifix nailed to the wall, surrounded by decorous engravings, and on a pedestal facing the crucifix he beheld a bust of the Republic, with wide-open plaster eyes, devoid of pupils, seemingly dilated by profound astonishment.

'Ah yes! that bust,' said Rennemoulin, replying to his guest's look of inquiry. 'My dear friend, you must know we are republicans—like the Pope. The Republic you see is *our* Republic, the honest,

tolerant Republic—Catholic, I may say, at bottom, though not fanatical.'

This was Rennemoulin's profession of faith, and Monsieur de Chanteprie recognised, in their calmer, more restrained guise, the same ideas enunciated in vehement, incorrect style by the *Rambolitein Cross*. What! the unostentatious green-painted hall, the museum embellished with photographs and plaster busts, the temperance restaurant, where was set forth, at reasonable charge, the 'wholesome, economical, pleasant meal'—all these were in reality only a piece of electioneering machinery?

People arrived: middle-aged men looking like churchwardens, priests, and worthy young men fresh from college.

'And what of the workmen?' said Augustine.

'Here they are.'

They came, numerically small, decently dressed, with calm, unemotional faces. A man mounted the rostrum, and delivered an address on 'Alcoholism, its causes, effects, and remedies.' He passed from physical hygiene to moral hygiene, and from moral hygiene to religion. Religion led up to social questions. He maintained that schools in which God was not taught paved the way for generations of drunkards.

Augustine was of the same opinion. But the crucifix, the plaster Republic, the lecturer's appeal to his hearers to 'cleanse the municipal council,' the presence of a candidate who offered to do this work of cleansing, if only the electors would return him—all these things seemed incongruous to Augustine, and somewhat cooled his admiration.

He did not doubt the sincerity of these men, nor the excellence of their intentions. But they were, at the same time, too aggressive and too prudent. They lacked the simplicity, enthusiasm, and warmth of true Christian charity. Occupied with party interests, they disregarded 'the preaching of the Cross, which is to them that perish foolishness.' They adopted Catholicism in its latest development, but did not want to be taken for bigots.

Monsieur de Chanteprie visited the building in the Rue Cardinal-Lemoine several times, and, whether he would or not, was included by Rennemoulin in the committee of the Catholic club. Then, by way of completing the education of his *protégé* from the provinces, by showing him the 'drunken helots'—as he called his opponents—Rennemoulin took him to the enemy's stronghold, in the very thick of the socialists. Augustine made the acquaintance of the 'Future Dawn'—the popular University of a distant suburb. He found there also the temperance restaurant, with tea, coffee, lemonade, and other non-alcoholic drinks, the museum, the work-room, the lecture-hall painted green, and furnished with chairs, benches, and rostrum. The plaster Republic opened its white eyes in a corner. A man gave an address on 'Alcoholism.' He passed from hygiene to morals, from morals to religion, and from religion to politics. 'The masses, kept in ignorant slavery by reactionaries and the clergy, seek to forget their misery in alcohol. The masses, liberated by the Revolution, and sharing the material welfare and æsthetic joys hitherto monopolised by those above them in station, would forsake the public-houses.'

From 'Houses of the People' to 'Workmen's Clubs' Monsieur de Chanteprie meekly followed Rennemoulin. He listened to countless lectures; he was present at mass-meetings which concluded with the singing of the 'International.' And he could not help a feeling of surprise. So the club in the Rue Cardinal-Lemoine was only a subdued imitation of these violent and revolutionary scenes! But the men he saw were not Christians, willing to endure present injustice for the sake of eternal reward. The thought of eternity did not affect their lives. They sought to realise an earthly paradise by earthly means. What if their song rose up to heaven like a hymn, what if their vows, their wishes, their hopes sounded like a prayer!—it was all the outcome of the religious instinct, outliving religion, and endeavouring to satisfy its needs with a new cult. They erected new idols: Humanity, Science, Truth, Justice—all of which had their priests and their martyrs.

These rough, credulous men, puffed up with words, proud of their smattering of science, were not to be despised or scoffed at. They were beginning to combine their scattered forces, and to-morrow perhaps they would be a formidable mass, hurled at the old world and its traditions. Rennemoulin knew the danger; he wanted to unite both the citizens and the proletariat under the Catholic *labarum*. Monsieur de Chanteprie could not but approve his enterprise: yet it grieved him to see the inferiority of Rennemoulin's coadjutors. They were good, well-meaning men, but their views had no solid foundation—no substratum of doctrine.

Where were the earnest Christians of the seventeenth century—the Le Maistres, the Arnaulds? Rennemoulin's friends wanted to reconcile religion and science, and because dogma did not serve their purpose they simply ignored dogma. The Christ they presented to the crowd was not the Mediator, the Sacrifice offered to Eternal Justice—He was a philosophical and socialist Christ, hand in glove with progress.

It pained Augustine to see the Divine Figure, Whose lineaments tradition had immutably fixed, thus deformed and profaned. He viewed with disapproval the polemical tactics of the political Catholics—their wrangles and disputes. And soon he lost his prestige as 'a Frenchman of the old school.' He was looked on askance as a tiresome fanatic, a Don Quixote whose fanciful ideas, tyrannical interference, and misplaced zeal were a nuisance to every one.

After a violent dispute, he one day quitted the club, never to return. Sad and weary, disgusted with himself and with everything, he paced the Rue Clovis. The church of St. Etienne-du-Mont promised him a refuge. He entered it.

The nave, with its clusters of pillars and its exquisite rood-loft, was quite light in the sunshine of a fine winter day, tempered as it was by the stained-glass windows. Augustine sought the shade of the transepts, and knelt near Pascal's tomb.

In front of him a young woman was pretending to read the epitaphs engraved on the black marble slabs. When Augustine looked at her she assumed

a conscious air, and put on the airs and graces of a woman who thinks she is being admired—but the young man's eyes did not linger on the toque of violets and the fair hair. He was recalling to memory a day when he and Monsieur Forgerus had together translated and commented on the pompous Latin of the funeral inscriptions. And the tutor had said :

“*Post aliquot annos in severiori secessu et divinæ legis meditatione transactos, feliciter et religiose in pace Christi vita functus.*” Look, Augustine, those same words might be engraved in the cloister of Hautfort, on the family vault of the Chantepries.’

Yes; that indeed had been the endeavour of his ancestors, and it had been in the past Augustine's endeavour too: to live in ascetic solitude and in meditation on the divine law, and to die happily and piously in the peace of Christ. But into his life had come a woman—a woman who expressed in her own person all the temptations and all the dangers of the age. Dragging the last of the Chantepries from his solitude, she had forced him to mix with men of the world—a world so corrupt that even its Catholics were no true Christians, and brought Christ to shame in their persons.

The fair woman, who seemed to be on the watch for some one, moved about and looked at Augustine. He turned his head, and suddenly a splendour as of gold and fire dazzled his eyes: in the adjoining chapel the shrine of St. Geneviève glittered behind a grating, amid the glow of thousands of wax candles. Before the grating a crowd had collected

—black, swarming like insects, whispering, gaping, open-mouthed—and, in front of the shrine, was a counter just like that of a shop, made of polished oak, behind which a cashier was receiving the price of candles and alms, and counting the money, supervised by a fat priest in a white surplice. Candles of all sizes, at ten, twenty, or a hundred sous, burned at the shrine, so crowded together on their supports that they looked from a distance like a pyramid of fire. The chink of money drowned the murmur of prayers. The chapel of the Patron Saint of Paris took on the aspect of a money-changer's shop. The scribes of the temple exercised their trade, and their customers were legion.

Augustine recognised the black capes, the crape bonnets, the faded shawls, the set, expressionless faces. He had seen just such a pious crowd in all the celebrated churches—Notre Dame, the Sacré-Cœur, and others. The God they adored was not the Christ of the Catholic clubs—the gentle philosopher and teller of parables—nor the Christ crucified on Golgotha, nor the just Christ seated on the right hand of the Father; it was the Christ manufactured by Loiselier and Co., the new Adonis wept by women, the handsome young man with the bleeding heart under his azure robes. And, even more than this effeminate Christ, the crowd worshipped the Virgin—the white and blue clad lady of miraculous grottoes, Queen of the Altar, supplanter of God Himself.

Alas! the salvation of the Church could not proceed from this sheeplike crowd, nor from the sellers of miracles, nor from rationalist Catholics like

Rennemoulin. Monsieur de Chanteprie recalled the hall of the 'House of the People'—the assembled workmen. What apostle and saviour of souls—be he ardent as Paul, and gentle as Francis d'Assisi—could bring these men to Christ? They lacked both hope and faith. And the Christianity of the apostles and fathers, of Pascal and of Bossuet, was represented in their eyes by the priest who discussed the price of a funeral or a mass, by the Jesuits, the Sacré-Cœur, and the mummery of the Rue Saint-Sulpice.

'Ah'! thought Augustine, 'if only I were worthy!'

A movement in the crowd attracted his attention. He saw a young man of his own age, well dressed, and somewhat embarrassed in manner, making his way as well as he could through the ranks of the pious. The fair woman went towards him. They walked down the nave together, talking in whispers.

'Lovers!—here!'

Slender, with rounded bosom and hips, she had the figure and walk of Madame Manolé. Augustine could no longer dream or pray. Desire had stifled his conscience. His last qualms had disappeared.

XX

MONSIEUR DE CHANTEPRIE crossed the 'Place du Panthéon'—a howling wilderness of grey stone. The quadrangular bulk of the monument and its dome resting on the colonnade, stood out in precise outline—a dark shadow against the pale greenish tint of the sky. A gust of north wind foretold a sharp, clear night and a touch of frost.

Couples went by: the fair woman and her companion, hurrying to their clandestine joy; a young man and a girl, who kissed each other openly at the corner of the Rue Valette; and two entwined shadows who sauntered up and down in front of the Law Schools.

Augustine thought of his room in the summer-house and of the inevitable insomnia which awaited him there. And suddenly his mind was stirred by other memories, a burning fever possessed him—Ah! to sleep, to forget his misery in Fanny's arms, in the warmth of her presence, in the sweet perfume of her dark hair! To feel, even in the dreams of a restless slumber, her feminine presence—the gentle palpitation of a heart in close proximity to his! Augustine hastened his steps. He walked in a kind of delirium, not seeing the glittering cafés of the boulevards, the merry groups, and the women in quest of a dinner who threw him, in passing, looks of invitation or of mockery.

'Fanny!' he repeated, intoxicated by the name alone, his hands trembling, his eyes shining.

He went to her, like the drunkard to his tavern or the madman to the river—to get rest at last—to drown both body and soul—to seek annihilation in love.

At the corner of the Rue Boissonade, he almost ran into George Barral.

'You are going no doubt to Madame Manolé's? She is not seeing any one.'

'Why not?'

'Don't you know she's ill? I went to give her news—good news—of her exhibition, and I found her faithful friend, Madame Robert, installed as nurse since yesterday.'

'But it's not serious, surely! What is the matter with her?'

'No; it's not serious—so it appears. Overwork, anxiety—who can tell—with women! But her door is closed.'

'I'll see Madame Robert,' said Augustine, irritated by Barral's tone.

Madame Robert received him coldly. He announced:

'I want to see Madame Manolé on very important business. Just five minutes! I must!'

The young woman asked him into the studio, and soon returned, smiling and mollified.

'Fanny is expecting you. Can you stay with her while I go home to dine? She is so miserable alone.'

'Certainly I will stay with her; and I'll keep guard over the door.'

Madame Robert laughed.

'I am quite sure you will keep strict guard over the door, but you should have come sooner. Your visit would have been the best medicine for Fanny.'

The room was dimly lighted by a lamp. Fanny, paler than her wont, her eyes large and very black, raised herself on the pillow. The air around her was impregnated with a fresh odour of perfume.

'Augustine, my dear love, how happy I am!'

He sat on the edge of the bed, and buried his head in her shoulder.

'Oh, my darling!'

He could say no more.

'I have had a slight touch of fever, but I'm better, I'm well already, now that you are here! How did you know I was ill? I didn't write to you, I didn't want to upset you.'

'That was very wrong of you,' said he. 'But I deserved it. I have been very neglectful of you lately; I hadn't the sense to see that you were tired—worn-out. Madame Robert is looking after you. Monsieur Barral, whom I met almost on your doorstep, is doing what he can for you. He is busying himself about some exhibition or other. And I—I know nothing, I do nothing, I am of no account. I have treated you badly, Fanny, but why hide your troubles from me? Why treat me as a stranger?'

She murmured:

'I dare not——'

'What! you dare not confide in me—in the man who loves you? And you confide in Barral! You slight me. I am grieved and hurt.'

'Is it my fault? You are seldom here. And besides, our situation is so strange—false even.'

‘Why?’

‘Formerly we were friends. Now we are—something less than lovers.’

‘What do you mean?’

‘Remember the delicious autumn. We were one—we two—in the house of the Poppy: we had but one mind, one desire, one thought—’

He said with a sigh:

‘Yes, it was sweet—divinely sweet!’

‘But afterwards, these two beings united in one became separate again. We were once more Monsieur de Chanteprie and Madame Manolé: only at times did we regain the sense of union. Besides—if only I could have seen you often, and for a length of time! But—I don’t know why—you forsook me. I couldn’t help thinking that being with me bored you, and that you preferred to go about Paris with Rennemoulin. And—enjoying no longer the cordial freedom of friendship, and not having yet arrived at the peacefulness of custom—we are neither altogether friends, nor altogether lovers. Isn’t it so?’

‘True.’

‘Well?’

‘Oh! my poor Fanny, what a selfish coward I am! How badly I love you! I ought to be happy—’

‘Are you not happy, when I love you, when I adore you?’

He murmured:

‘No. And it’s not your fault, my darling. You are good, you are tender, you are patient. I ought to go down on my knees and thank you. But I have a mind ill-suited for a clandestine, guilty love. I suffer, Fanny, I suffer terribly. I don’t refer

merely to the suffering caused me by my mother and my friends. But my whole past seems to be slipping away from me. No, I won't say any more. I didn't come to tell you of the thoughts that haunt me. Don't question me, darling! Take me to your dear breast like a wounded child; pity me as I pity you, and never doubt my love, which is infinite, eternal—and fraught with sorrow for us both!

'Say no more; I understand! Let's leave it all to time, and have faith in each other. I only ask what is in your power to give. Only love me.'

'I love you.'

She continued:

'For a long time now I have given up all hope of marriage. I am not a creditor who claims love as a debt, and bars the future with her body. You owe me nothing but complete confidence and complete sincerity. I will be what you want: wife, mistress, friend—or that shadowy weeping woman, who is a feature of every man's past—'

'Do you suppose——'

'I know how love-affairs end. Only to-day Louise was talking to me about Rennemoulin. Poor woman! for the last five years she has been an example of the resignation which asks nothing, the indulgence which pardons everything—a monument of silent, suffering love.'

'Does he not love her?'

'He! He keeps her to fill up the interval between the girls of the Latin Quarter whom he knew at twenty and the well-dowered *ingénue* who will delight him at thirty. And poor Louise does not foresee the rupture which I know is imminent—the

silent, gentle rupture for which he has already paved the way, and of which he realises the consequences. He knows well enough that all will end well, and that Louise will cause no scandal. He will return to the path of duty—the path which leads to a brilliant marriage.'

'Fanny, why do you talk to me of Rennemoulin? You have some hidden reason!'

'I know that our love too has no future, and although I am resigned beforehand——'

'Resigned! No, you're not resigned! My darling, look at me, look into my eyes! Well, although I am a strange, unsatisfactory, poor sort of lover, do you think me capable of paving the way for a "silent, gentle rupture"? Oh! Fanny, there is no need of an oath before men to unite us to all eternity. And if we had to separate, you would still remain the only one! All the paths of repentance don't lead to a brilliant marriage, Fanny. Whether you are absent or present, faithful or unfaithful to my memory, I shall have sacrificed to our love all my hopes of earthly happiness. Remember my words in the woods of Port-Royal: "You or nobody." I have not changed.'

'You are sincere, but you are too young to pledge your future. I know from experience that a living, healthy being, in the enjoyment of full strength, cannot endure perpetual solitude. It does not suffice us to love a shadow, our love must be satisfied with a tangible object, which we can clasp in our arms and kiss with our lips of flesh. You would forget me, Augustine!'

He said gravely:

‘Fanny, I am a man of one love, as I am a man of one idea. No, I should not forget you. And would to God that our perishable bodies might be separated for ever, if only our souls, reconciled at last and happy, might be united for ever in His bosom!’

‘Your religious fancies again!’ said Fanny.

Her heart misgave her.

Heretofore, knowing well Rennemoulin and those like him, she had looked without displeasure on Augustine’s excursions into the realms of neo-Catholicism. She thought he would return from them with his eyes opened and his ideas readjusted. Augustine’s melancholy moods, his varying temper, which sometimes led him to shut himself up at home for days together, and at others caused him to fall into her arms: the phases of dumb jealousy, furious desire, inexplicable indifference—were they not symptoms of the moral revolution Fanny so ardently desired? And she had been deceived after all. Her lover returned to her sadder than before, having lost an illusion, but with his faith unimpaired, and still a Christian—yes, a Christian in his very disillusionment and remorse. Like Phædra, both guilty and virtuous, he sinned and hated his sin, and, although he no longer had the strength to strive after what he called goodness, he had not ceased to love that goodness.

‘He only wants “grace” to enable him to give me up,’ she thought; ‘our love is at the mercy of a phenomenon of auto-suggestion.’

However, Augustine’s love somewhat reassured her.

An act of imprudence prolonged her illness, and for several days Augustine lived at her house, arriving by the first train and departing by the last. It was a happy truce, during which their anguish of mind and senses died down, and the lovers lived over again their old love, and the time when, without reserve or reticence, he was hers in all purity, and she was his.

The week's rest came to an end. Fanny could get up. Her eyes were still languid under their heavy, dusky lids, but her lips and cheeks had bloomed again. One evening when Augustine bestowed on her his farewell kiss, he felt her tremble at the caress, and the kiss descended from her hair to her neck, and then sought the lips which thrilled with love——

He left about daybreak, sick at heart.

But now he knew the real cause of the mental uneasiness of which he seemed to be rid when Fanny was ill, and which tortured him anew when he sounded the depths of passion. It was the sordid undercurrent, the trouble and suffering which sensual desire imparts to love.

Fanny had begged Monsieur de Chanteprie to return the next day. But he knew now only too well the power of this woman, and he knew he could no longer be with her without wanting to possess her. Through an instinct of defence, hating and adoring her at the same time, he began to avoid her again. In spite of oaths sworn lip to lip, his coldness and his periods of absence made Fanny utterly miserable.

XXI

‘MY friend, you are unhappy,’ said the Abbé Vitalis.

Augustine and he were talking at the fireside, in the presbytery dining-room.

‘You are unhappy, I know. Come now, don’t mind what you say. I am not a confessor admonishing a penitent. I am a friend, and speak as man to man. “Nothing human is strange to me.”’

‘Ah, father, I hope human misery and vileness are strange to you, and particularly the misery and vileness of what they call love. But you are sheltered from it all, and I envy you. Perhaps, if I had had a vocation for the priesthood, if I had been cut off from women by a solemn vow, I should have received the grace necessary for my condition. I should have been able to save souls without being led astray by the flesh; but in my guilty pride I walked at the edge of a precipice dreaded by the saints themselves. Dizziness overcame me—I fell.’

‘And now?’

‘Now the woman I love has lost me; I have not saved her, and we both suffer.’

‘Desperate diseases require desperate remedies! You love a woman; she loves you: marry her.’

‘Impossible.’

‘Impossible? The Apostle says that “it is good for a man not to touch a woman,” but he says also that “it is better to marry than to burn.” And

Augustine, your Patron Saint, who knew from experience the misery and wretchedness of human love—St. Augustine deplores the imprudence of his parents, in not arranging a marriage for him when he was young. Remember the second book of the *Confessions*: “Et quid erat quod me delectabat, nisi amare et amari?” Even before his concubine had returned to Africa, before he had torn her from his heart, his friends and family were trying to get him married. You will answer, no doubt, that, after his meditation in the garden, he abandoned rhetoric and all his earthly hopes, to live in penitence and chastity. You will say, too, that Augustine married would not have been St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippone and Father of the Church. Well, my friend, you who do not aspire to canonisation, or even to a bishopric, may well be content with virtue of the everyday sort, and not reject the only remedy which can cure your disease.’

‘I understand you,’ replied Monsieur de Chanteprie; ‘but why did it not occur to Augustine’s mother and friends to give him as wife the concubine whom he so faithfully loved—the mother of Adeodatus? Why did they leave her to languish in a convent? And she was a Christian! Augustine could not look on her as an enemy to his faith. Together they had brought up their son in the love and knowledge of the same God. But—because he had loved this mistress with a carnal love, because she typified the chief and the dearest of his sins—Augustine feared she would come between God and himself. He sought marriage—not love—and found repentance. Don’t ask Thérèse-Angélique de Chanteprie to do what St. Monica did not do.’

'Ah! you are well acquainted with your texts,' said the priest, 'and you interpret them to suit your own views. My friend, the ideal is the enemy of the real. Your scruples are your undoing. I tell you again: marry her, it will turn out all right.'

'Indeed! I admire your fine optimism. "It will turn out all right!" Very well! I'll drag from my mother the consent she withholds—which she is quite right in withholding. Fanny will play before the altar the *rôle* of a Christian wife participating in the sacrament of marriage, and—to spare her the trifling falsehood involved—I'll buy her a certificate of confession the night before. It's often done in Paris. And later on, when a son is born to us, he will hear in turn our conflicting instructions. It will turn out all right! Won't it?'

'I thought I was giving you useful advice. But perhaps you are right, perhaps you are not cut out for marriage—for this marriage.'

'If you only knew my life for the last six months!' cried Monsieur de Chanteprie.

He made no further attempt at concealment. He told the sad story of his love, the diversion he had sought, the disillusionment he had suffered.

'I am truly sorry for you!' said Vitalis. 'The situation is terrible. For her sake and your own, if you cannot marry Madame Manolé, make a supreme effort: leave her.'

'Leave her!—expose her to worse sorrow, worse temptations! Leave her, for others to take her from me—others who covet her already! If only I knew she had the strength to live alone!—but she is young and beautiful, and cannot live without love. Her irreligion is hateful to me, I detest the world

in which she lives ; but as for herself—I love her ! Oh ! I love her !’ he repeated, overcome by a nervous emotion which made his lips and eyelids tremble.

The priest leaned towards the glowing logs, which cast a ruddy reflection on his thin face, and said :

‘What astonishes me most of all, Augustine, is that so violent a passion as yours has not driven God altogether from your heart. Answer me candidly : Is your faith still firm and unswerving ?’

‘If my faith were gone, I should perhaps be calm. And you see what I am !’

‘But you haven’t practised your religion since——’

‘How could I dare lie to God, approach the confessional, ask absolution for a sin which I do not hate enough to give it up, receive the host on my lips which—No, Father, no ! I am a wretch sitting at the gates of the temple, among the publicans and sinners. The reflection of the candles, and the echo of the prayers and praises, reach me. And—miserable exile as I am—in the cold, black night of sin—I still pray. Ah ! I have never ceased to pray ! Even at the worst moments, when I was leaving my mistress, delirious with the rapture of possessing her—she would cling to me ; she would ask me : “Are you happy ?” and alas ! I had a taste of ashes in my mouth. And in the depths of my heart a wailing voice arose, a voice which no longer uttered formal words of prayer, a despairing voice which said : “Lord ! Lord !”’

His face suddenly contracted in an agonised expression. He put his head between his hands, and wept.

Vitalis looked at him :

‘Weep,’ said he, ‘if it does you good. Don’t be

ashamed, poor child that you are. I understand. I have known sorrow and temptation of another sort.'

He stirred the fire. Nothing could be heard but the hissing of the sap in the burning wood, the ticking of the clock, the pattering of a shower of rain, and Augustine's sobs.

'I wish I could find words to console you,' said Vitalis. 'I wish——'

And as if speaking to himself, he continued:

'You suffer cruelly, my friend, but you have faith, and faith is always accompanied by hope. The grace you are in need of, you hope will be granted you by a God who is supremely good. You still pray. Think of those who can no longer pray—of those who wander in the dark mazes of doubt. I know men—priests even, Augustine—priests who had sincerely and cheerfully renounced the world, woman, and love. An act of faith had silenced the voice of their rebellious senses, the revolt of their hearts weaned from human love. And then, slowly, as the years rolled by, they felt their faith die. In vain they wept and cried before the empty tabernacle: the God whom they adored so fervently had vanished like a shadow. Around them and in them now, is nothingness. What are they to do? What is to become of them? The man who is brought up, taught, and moulded for the priesthood, remains fast bound to the priesthood. He is a priest for ever. The black robe is a symbol of mourning which cannot be discarded. And so the unfortunate man continues his ministry: he tries to do for the love of humanity what he can no longer do for the love of God. And in the ear of the afflicted, at the bedside of the dying, he forces himself to utter vain and

hollow words—formulas which have lost their significance for him. For if the priest so far forgot himself as to speak frankly to his fellow-men, the penitent would leave the confessional, the dying man would rise up on his bed, to cry: "Go, renegade!" I have known such priests, Augustine, and again I say: unhappy as you are—you who can still pray—think of those who cannot even say: "Lord! Lord!"

Monsieur de Chanteprie in his turn looked fixedly at the abbé. Vitalis averted his face, and mechanically stirred the fire, now almost extinct. There was a long and painful silence. Then the sabots of Vitalis' mother were heard in the passage. A harsh voice called:

'Martial!'

'Yes, mother, I'm here. What do you want?'

'Old Vittelot is very ill. He wants the Sacrament.'

'I will leave you,' said Monsieur de Chanteprie.

'Mother,' cried Vitalis, 'send for the altar-boy. I will come immediately.'

He accompanied Monsieur de Chanteprie as far as the garden. A few drops of rain were still falling. Clouds, heavy with approaching showers, were gathering on the horizon. The church, built on the height and overtopping the village, was sketched in sombre outline against the grey sky, among the black pines of the burial-ground.

'Good-bye, my dear Augustine, and—courage!'

'Good-bye.'

Their hands met, and Monsieur de Chanteprie proceeded slowly along the road to Chêne-Pourpre.

'Poor soul! poor, tortured soul!' muttered Vitalis, with a sigh.

XXII

THIRTY artists had combined to exhibit, at common expense, various works of art—such as enamels, glass and ceramic ware, pewter, jewels, stuffs, and furniture belonging to no recognised school. And the opening of this 'Thirty Exhibition' was attracting all Paris to the Petitot Gallery.

The long hall, with its glass roof, red carpet, red walls, and red settees surrounding graceful palms whose stems were hidden—this hall humming with voices and hot as a conservatory, was crossed obliquely by a shaft of misty sunshine. A rainbow-tinted dust floated in the beam of light, and blended into harmony a thousand specks of diverse hue: the bright greens, dull purples, crude blues, and gay or sombre reds of ladies' costumes, the fresh gilt of picture-frames, hair of many hues, bright or haggard faces, in which one could only distinguish, from a distance, two dark eyes and a crimson mouth.

'Watch the door!' cried Barral, suddenly separated from Rennemoulin by the crowd.

They were expecting Fanny. She had promised to meet them, punctually at four o'clock, in front of the glass case which enclosed her own exhibits: a series of designs on leather, for bookbinding.

A movement of the crowd brought Saujon and Coquardeau before them, the painter clothed in a

black cloak and a soft hat, the sculptor dressed like a workman in his Sunday clothes. Madame Saujon followed, looking an odd figure in her thirty-nine franc tailor-made costume, wearing no corsets, and with a grey felt boat-shaped hat perched on her smoothly parted hair.

‘Your pewters are very good—very pretty!’ said Barral to Coquardeau. ‘Why did you not exhibit, Saujon?’

‘No time—the Salon—a youngster arrived——’

‘I congratulate you all the same: he’ll be a child-model for you at home. What have you for the Salon?’

‘The boy and girl in the meadow, under the willows. Come to my studio. I’ll show it to you.’

‘I’ll try to bring Fanny with me. By the way, you haven’t seen Madame Manolé?’

‘No; but I’ve seen her exhibits. They’re rather good—those little things of hers. They show appreciation of simple, decorative form, in the Japanese style. Yes, Fanny Manolé sometimes has ideas that are not at all bad. You can see she has learned in a good school, in her father’s—Corvis’s—school, and in Nature’s too. Her pastels are not mere ladylike work; they don’t suggest the Jullian Academy. Our friend Fanny would be a true artist if she could send love to the devil. Yes, love—a cursed kill-joy and foe to work! When an artist takes it into his head to fall in love, Barral—when a woman gets hold of his very heart and soul—he is done for, he is dead to art. A great artist is a great egotist. That’s why women are always second-rate artists: their own particular function,

their genius, their happiness, is love. Art is a makeshift, a consolation. Remember Porto-Riche's pithy saying: "Behind a woman's talent lies a lost happiness." Poor Fanny!

'Saujon, you're a philosopher. But you shouldn't say these things to me; you should say them to Madame Manolé. Here she comes!'

Fanny, in a black hat and gown, approached the group, who received her with congratulations and reproaches.

'Come,' said Barral, 'I must introduce Ferroy to you.'

He stopped a passer-by—an old man with a white beard, crimson nose, and veined, bloodshot eyes.

'Dear master, you have not forgotten Jean Corvis's daughter? I want your good offices on her behalf. Look at her exhibits. You will be delighted with them.'

'But I am already delighted to make Madame Manolé's acquaintance,' said Ferroy, bringing his crimson face nearer Fanny's.

But Barral drew him on:

'This way, dear master!'

And, in front of the glass case, Ferroy went into raptures. The pieces of leather, worked on by means of heat or by acids, the decorative art which grouped ordinary little plants and creatures in a manner entirely original—they betokened ideas which, as Saujon said, were 'not at all bad,' but which were indeed entirely new and quaint.

'Congratulations! I won't forget: Madame Manolé, you say?' The stout man made a note of Fanny's name and address—2 B, Rue Boissonade.

'You must come and see me, madame. We will have a talk. You interest me immensely. And then I'll come to your studio. Have you a day? No? All the better. We'll make an appointment. We shall be able to look at your work undisturbed. But come to me first. I'm at home every Tuesday from four to six. Come early. You will, won't you? I shall count on you. Good-bye, my dear Barral. Good-bye, madame.'

'You have made a conquest of him,' said Barral, while Ferroy wended his way through the crowd. 'The fat old reprobate means to take you under his wing. But I didn't reckon on the invitation, Fanny; that's a trick of his!'

'A trick?'

'Yes; be on your guard. When a woman goes to see Ferroy he's respectful for the first quarter of an hour, then he gets paternal, then familiar. And very soon he asks his visitor the colour of her garters—and he takes care to satisfy himself that she speaks the truth!'

'And you introduce such a man to me?'

'Why not? He may be of use to you! And he won't use force with you. It's for you to know how to defend yourself cleverly. Don't cry "Murder!" for trifles, don't play the prude, but stop the good man as soon as he becomes too—enterprising. But do it without getting angry—with just a gay word and a smile.'

• 'What shameful blackmailing!' said Fanny. 'Are there really women who, for the sake of an article from Ferroy——?'

'Indeed there are!'

'Well, your Ferroy may wait a long time for my

visit. How stifling it is! What a mob! Come, Rennemoulin, let's go.'

'I'm thirsty,' said Barral. 'I've done nothing but swallow dust for two mortal hours waiting for you. Let's go and have a cocktail. And then Rennemoulin will fetch our friend Madame Robert, and we'll all four dine together. I want to celebrate Madame Manolé's approaching glory by a feast. Are you free this evening, Fanny?'

'Why should I not be free? Do you suppose it matters to any one in the world what I do or don't do? I haven't the courage to go home all alone. So you'll fetch Louise, won't you, Rennemoulin?'

The Anglo-American bar was almost empty. Barral took his friends into a little room boarded with pitch pine, and furnished in varnished wood, like the cabin of a steamer; and he ordered weird mixtures compounded of various sorts of alcoholic drinks, lemon, spices, soda water, and pounded ice.

Fanny drank a glass of wine.

'What has become of Monsieur de Chanteprie?' asked Rennemoulin. 'Has he taken to a country life again? It is the best thing he can do, poor boy!'

'I expected to see him to-day in the Petitot Gallery; but he wired me that he couldn't come.'

Rennemoulin continued:

'I have heard nothing more of him. I'm afraid he and I have quarrelled. And it's a pity. But your friend, madame, does not grasp the realities of life. Our fellow-workers looked askance at the dangerous recruit who would soon have compromised us all. Are you laughing, Barral? I'm not joking. He can argue; and his uncompromising logic might

unsettle and alarm our adherents. In a few days' time Monsieur de Chanteprie would have called us Jesuits. It's not a word they like! And, moreover, just see the astonishing effect of too strict a religious education: Monsieur de Chanteprie—a Jansenist and a Gallican to the very core—accepts the dogma of infallibility with reluctance, and yet believes himself more infallible than the Pope! Now I'll go and fetch Madame Robert, and bring her to you in half an hour.'

'Make haste!' said Fanny.

When Barral was alone with her he said reproachfully:

'Why do you want Rennemoulin to make haste? Do I bore you? Are you afraid of me?'

'No, but——'

'You've been crying again. You're desperately unhappy. It's because of him, isn't it? You were expecting him?'

'He promised—swore to me—that he would go with me on this opening day. I looked forward to it so much! And now I have one telegram the more in my collection! I have kept them all—those telegrams of excuse and refusal. Oh, George! what a life! what torture! My strength is all gone. I am wretched, exasperated, desperate! Who will deliver me from this love?'

'Who will deliver you from it? Monsieur de Chanteprie himself. But not yet, Fanny, not just yet. You have not suffered enough. You still retain a gleam of hope. You trust to chance, circumstances, time. Monsieur de Chanteprie will have to deprive you of these last illusions. But certain sure symptoms tell me that the hour of your delivery

is at hand. You say, "Who will deliver me from this love?" Of course you are not quite sincere in saying it, but there is some little progress—a shade——'

'I believe you're laughing at me.'

'I? Not at all. I am humbly rejoicing at the approaching end of your troubles. And notice how disinterested I am. I'm not making love to you. I don't make use of the privileges conferred on me by our friendship, your distress, and the unworthy conduct of Monsieur de Chanteprie——'

'Please talk of something else!'

'All right. Don't suppose that I take pleasure in exciting your anger, your just resentment at your lover's neglect. I, who will never quarrel with you, I, who am a philosopher and an optimist, indulgent and patient—why, the whole future is mine, and I shall be able to choose the right moment to plead my cause. I shall benefit by the comparison you'll make. And I cannot but think Monseieur de Chanteprie is working for me——'

Barral spoke gently but firmly—a kindly smile playing about his lips; and his smile somewhat toned down the veiled sarcasm of his eyes and the presumption of his words.

'Your jokes are of the most extraordinary kind!' replied Fanny. 'Oh! what a strange man you are! Your conduct shows you the most devoted of my friends, but your attitude and your language show you—what?—a hunter on the look-out for prey, watching the flutterings of a poor little bird. There are moments when I am afraid of you, moments when I hate you, and moments when I am almost grateful to you for not deserting me altogether.'

‘If I deserted you, Fanny, you would be utterly alone. For Saujon, Coquardeau, and the rest are not friends—only comrades. Rennemoulin is a passer-by, Madame Lassaugette is in America, and Louise Robert can be of no earthly use to you. You are alone and in the Parisian world. A woman who belongs to no one man—be he lover or husband—belongs to all men. They think so, at any rate, and they say so. Do you know what Ferroy asked me, first of all, when I told him about you?

“A young widow, Corvis’s daughter.”

“Is she pretty?”

“Yes; very pretty.”

“And who is her protector?”

“No one.”

“Oh, come now!”

‘I had to disclaim the good fortune he attributed to me, and so he invited you to his Tuesday receptions, which he would not have done if I had had the right to look straight into his face and say: “Fanny Manolé is my—friend.”’

‘I’d like Augustine to hear you. Then perhaps he’d understand. Oh! I wish I were the wife of a workman or a peasant who loved me! I wish I were a vulgar, coarse, stupid—but happy—creature. How glorious it would be—how sweet—to be happy, George!’

Barral, smiling under his brown beard, was rolling a cigarette between his fingers.

‘There come our lovers,’ he said.

Madame Robert, fair and flushed, her eyes shining with a becoming gaiety, greeted Fanny, and, following the recognised code among women, began by saying:

‘What a pretty gown!’

Fanny pulled herself together sufficiently to reply that the dressmaker had been no end of a nuisance to her. The two men listened to their chatter with condescension mingled with faint contempt.

They dined at a boulevard restaurant where the strangely assorted crowd amused the two young women.

The white and gold woodwork, the yellow plush upholstery, the many-tinted decorations of the ceiling, the twinkling of the candles under their orange shades, the sheen of the silver, the steady glow of the electric lights, the perfume of roses, the murmur of voices, the warmth of the wines—all the images and sensations of the evening were whirling in Fanny’s brain when she emerged from the restaurant. Madame Robert and Rennemoulin had set out on foot in the fresh night air; Barral was to accompany Fanny. They drove off in a cab and crossed the Place de l’Opéra where were mingled pedestrians, carriages, omnibuses, and the members of the municipal guard. Then they came upon the deserted quays, the black and gold Seine, and the narrow streets of its western shore.

In the fitfully illumined darkness Fanny’s depression returned. A man was near her holding her hand, uttering words of encouragement and consolation, distressed at her weariness, asking if she were cold. This man loved her in his own fashion, and she appreciated his kindness and solicitude to a certain extent. But she did not love him. Ah! how sweet it would have been to return home on this night of early spring, if Fanny could have closed her eyes and leaned her head on Augustines’

shoulder. Alas! Augustine was troubling himself little enough about Fanny just then. He was not jealous.

‘Are you comfortable?’ said Barral.

‘Yes, thank you.’

‘I wish I could cheer you up and do you good. I was so sorry for you this evening! How badly you are being treated, my poor little friend!’

She did not answer.

‘Is my presence distasteful to you? I am so afraid you will think me wanting in tact.’

‘No, indeed; you are good. You are a devoted and disinterested friend. You are admirable!’

‘Now you are sarcastic. But I like your sarcasm better than your tears. Come, laugh at me! You’ll have the advantage of me, for I’m not at all lively to-night.’

‘How is that?’

‘Because I’m uneasy and perplexed.’

‘Sentimental?’

‘Almost.’

‘Then you must be ill. I must look after you.’

She laughed. He drew gently nearer.

‘Laugh again; I love your laugh. I love the flash of your teeth and your eyes in the gloom. Oh! how can a man beloved by you wreck his happiness? So many men would be mad with joy, pride, and longing!’

Barral’s voice was strange, and Fanny, vaguely uneasy, replied coldly:

‘What do the others matter to me?’

‘So you’ll always be the humble and submissive lover—neglected, forsaken, and contented with odd

scraps of love? You'll never take your revenge? You'll never know what it is to be loved, caressed, and adored?'

'Love Augustine no more! Love another man! Ah! sometimes I only wish I could! But I am not mistress of my heart. I have given it; I can't take it back again in a day at will.'

'Try!'

'You are mad!'

'I love you!'

'You! the disinterested friend!'

'I love you. You will love me!'

'I don't want to love you, George. Oh, you are losing your head! Are you going to make me repent?'

'Fanny—listen. I don't ask you to love me all at once. I would win you gradually—afterwards—I am sure. But let us take a step together—a step which you can forget to-morrow if you like, and of which I will never remind you. Fanny, you are unhappy. You are not loved—no, indeed, you are not. Why should you hesitate? And I, I tremble when near you, I am mad with longing for you. I want to possess you—to break the spell you are under, to set you free——'

'You must be out of your mind, George! I hope I shall forget your insulting words. Let me get down.'

She got up to lower the window of the carriage door, but Barral seized her roughly by the waist and drew her to his knee. She felt his sensual lips on hers.

'Let me go, George! Let me go!'

With all her strength she repelled his caresses,

but soon, overpowered and helpless, she shuddered with shame and terror. Then she seemed to yield, to give way; his grasp relaxed, and Fanny, standing up suddenly, struck him full in the face with the fist that was free.

What happened then? She could never in after days piece together the scene whose details mingled confusedly in her memory. She tried to open the door and call the driver; she wept; she repeated: 'Coward! Villain!' And Barral, sobered and confused, entreated her forgiveness.

At last the carriage stopped. Fanny found herself on the pavement in front of her door—saved!

How dark and cold the wretched dwelling was! The woman who waited on her had not come. In her room gowns were lying on the furniture, and the tumbled sheets strewed the floor.

Fanny, seized with a fit of nervous trembling, her cheeks still bathed with tears, picked up Augustine's telegram which lay forgotten on the floor. The idea of the outrage she had been subjected to filled her with horror. Her pride and modesty were affronted. She had followed Barral, she had accepted his company and his attempts at consolation. No doubt she had seemed to encourage him. And this same man had pretended to be her only friend!

'How disgraceful! how disgraceful!' she sobbed, wringing her hands. 'He dared—he must have thought—I'll never see him again! But who will love me, who will protect me against them all and against myself? I am alone—utterly alone—Augustine loves me no more!'

XXIII

AT the little garden door Fanny found Jacqueline waiting for her.

'Come in quickly!' she said. 'The Piédeloups, and Perdriels were prowling round just now. They didn't see you, did they?—the wretches!'

'I met no one.'

'They say all kinds of things against you and me, my dear lady!—such things!—and their talk reaches the ears of Madame Angélique. Just at this time she's not looking after me.'

The light breezes of twilight stirred the trees of 'Julia's Grove,' over whose brown and yellow twigs the finger of spring had laid a mantle of tender green.

Jacquine continued:

'Your letter came this morning. Augustine could not make out whether you intended to come straight here at once or to go first to Chêne-Pourpre. He told me to look out for you between five and six o'clock, to explain.'

'Isn't he here, then?'

'He is at old Faron's with Monsieur Courdimanche.'

'Old Faron's?'

'Yes; an old drunkard who is dying of drink. It has given him some kind of brain-sickness; he

screams so, and makes such faces, that every one is afraid of him. And so Monsieur Courdimanche is looking after him.'

'He's a good man—Monsieur Courdimanche.'

'Possibly. But are lazy, good-for-nothing wretches like Faron fit society for a Chanteprie? And those are the only sort of people Augustine sees nowadays. He is constantly with Monsieur Courdimanche. Will he never give up his religious ideas?'

The blue stone trembled on Jacqueline's cheek. With her shrivelled hands under her black shawl, and her look fixed on Fanny, she seemed to say:

'What are you thinking of, and what are you about, to let the man who loves you cling to such ideas?'

'I can do nothing with him, my poor Jacqueline.'

'You can do nothing? Almighty God! Have you never looked at yourself? He's made like other men! I've seen boys who were as good as little angels till they were seventeen or eighteen years old, but when they had seen a pretty girl at close quarters! You're not making my boy miserable, are you?'

'I, Jacqueline! No, indeed, it is he——'

'Holy Mother! I only think of him; I love what he loves, and I love you because of him. The people of Hautfort call me names, because I am on the side of you and of love, Madame Fanny, against the priests. There's nothing better in the world, when one's young, than love! Nature wills it. We must listen to nature. Love makes plain girls pretty, and stupid ones witty. I hoped it would change my poor boy's disposition! Don't think Augustine

means to be cruel, or doesn't love you, my dear lady! but he's been so queerly brought up. He'll always feel the effects of it.'

'Always?'

'Yes, indeed. Madame Angélique was not made for marriage. She married her cousin against her will, out of obedience to her parents. I can see the poor young man now! He was just like his son. People who are always wrapped up in books and prayers haven't the pluck to live. They are always thinking of what's going to happen after death, and they forget that this life is good. Monsieur de Chanteprie died young, and I quite thought our Augustine would follow him. He was such a frail child!'

'You took care of him, Jacqueline. You have been his real mother, I know.'

'Yes—his real mother. I have watched over him, rocked him, fondled him, restored him to the world. And I swore that the priests should not have him for their God! I thought: "Madame Angélique and Monsieur Forgerus are working in vain. Jacqueline is here. And if only our Augustine reaches twenty, Jacqueline will show that she is right—before all the world." Do you understand?' she said, in a tone of savage maternity, which made Fanny shudder. 'A woman had to be found for the boy to love: you or another, it was all the same to me! But, since it was you he wanted, I made up my mind he should have you. I was yours, as I am his. Almighty God! Have you only water in your veins? If I were at your age, and such as I see you, I would soon have taken my Augustine away from here, somewhere or

other—no matter where. The air of this place is no good to him.'

The two women—the lover and the servant—looked at each other, and in Jacquine's yellow pupils Fanny read a prayer and a counsel.

'I'll try,' she said.

'Well, I'll leave you, Madame Fanny. Go up to the bedroom, to wait for Augustine, and, if you're afraid of the dark, light the candles.'

The closed shutters darkened the ground floor of the summer-house, but a gleam of light still illumined the rooms on the first floor. Fanny wandered from room to room, picked up a book and turned its leaves without reading it, and then came back and sat down against the study window.

The pale, soft-toned, purplish sky was fading into gloom over the violet plain of Hautfort. The bats had already quitted their holes, and were hovering round the ruins.

'How late he is!' thought Fanny

Far down, in the distance, the chapels and cypresses of the burial-ground were huddled together within the arches of the little cloister. Fanny recalled the autumn evening when, dining with Augustine, she began to talk of the crowned skeleton which figured at ancient feasts—that Death, which, amid the scarlet poppies of Venus, exhorted lovers to rejoice in the present. She had interpreted in her own way the lesson taught by the dead who lay on the hill-side. But afterwards! She could well imagine Augustine's fancies—the perpetual terror of eternity rooted in the heart of a Christian.

The moist freshness of the night crept into the

summer-house; in the distance a clock struck. A melancholy barking could be heard—then silence. Still Augustine did not come.

Without, windows were lighted up. The postboy's horn resounded in the church square. And then silence again. The young woman listened attentively for the indistinct sounds of night. Had Monsieur de Chanteprie forgotten her? She was alone, faint with cold and hunger, sick with fear. Groping her way, she found matches on the chimneypiece, and lighted the only candle; and the faint illumination seemed to endow the old tomb-like dwelling with a little life.

And then her watch began again, under the severe eyes of the four bishops who occupied the four panels of the study-walls. The decayed condition of everything amazed Fanny. She had never before noticed the shabby state of the furniture: the fluted curtains of the bookcases were only greenish rags; the wood of the armchairs was worm-eaten. The faded upholstery was threadbare.

'Outside, there's the obsession of the burial-ground: inside, the obsession of the past. In this house made for love, all is dust, ashes, and melancholy. And it's here that Augustine has to live! Ah! Jacquine is right. We must leave it, we must go away—both of us—to the world's end!'

It was now pitch dark. A draught of air made the flame of the candle flicker, and cast on the walls enormous, distorted, moving shadows. In a corner the Jansenist Christ with its extended arms lengthened out disproportionately. Fanny had seen this strange Christ—an heirloom from the

miraculously cured Agnes—in Augustine's room in former days. But since the autumn Monsieur de Chanteprie had had no crucifix in his room.

Nine o'clock was striking when Augustine arrived.

'You're still waiting for me!' he cried, seeing Fanny. 'I thought you must have gone, and I hurried to Chêne-Pourpre. Haven't you dined?'

'No. Jacquine left me here, and advised me not to stir.'

'Forgive me, I'm so sorry. You should have gone, and not waited so long. I was detained by a sad duty. Poor Faron is dead.'

'Well, so much the better for him, and for his family.'

'Not at all, for he died insane, without the rites of the Church. He was not conscious of his condition, and had no chance to repent. Oh, such frightful delirium, such inhuman shrieks! What a terrible punishment! Poor man!'

'If Faron had lasted all night, you would have left me to wait for you all night. It's too bad of you.'

Augustine replied:

'When I received your note this morning I wanted to wire to you to postpone your visit for a few days. But your letter was so vaguely worded that I didn't know where to send a telegram—whether to Paris or to Chêne-Pourpre. I didn't understand——'

'And I did not anticipate putting you to inconvenience. Excuse me; you forbade these—surprises. But there are still two trains to Paris.'

'Well, you won't go till the last one, and you will dine with me, my darling. Don't be sarcastic. You're not putting me to inconvenience.'

He kissed her cold cheek.

'You're still sulking. It's not generous of you, Fanny.'

She kept back her tears, though her bosom was heaving with anguish. Ah! how he could torture her! 'You'll take the last train!' He seemed to think it quite natural. Why then had she come, if not to have him to herself for a little while, from dark to dawn, heart to heart? Was it for her to say, 'Let us love. Let us rest together?' She was ready to die of shame. 'You'll take the last train!'

'The servant has gone to tell Jacquine. My poor little girl, it'll be a shabby sort of dinner for you.'

'Never mind. I'm not exacting, you know,' she said in a low tone, fearing lest she should break into sobs.

He drew nearer to her, and she raised her eyes to his.

'You look tired,' she said. 'Do I annoy you? Shall I go away? I don't like to see you as you are. Give me your hand. Yes, you are feverish.'

'I'm not ill, so don't worry. But, Fanny, don't go so soon, and don't be angry with me.'

'Angry?'

She gently raised his hand to her lips.

'Can I be angry with you? No, don't take your hand away. I love you.'

'What a child you are!'

And, in a brisk voice, as if to quell his own emotion as well as hers, he said:

'Come, Fanny, let's be reasonable. Don't let us give way.'

‘Yes. I was forgetting that I have to take the last train.’

He had no time to reply, for Jacquine entered with the dinner.

‘Oh, you may well look cross!’ she said to Augustine. ‘And Madame Fanny—just look at her! Couldn’t the old drunkard have died sooner?’

‘Be quiet, Jacquine! I am no longer of an age to be spoken to by you like this!’

‘Oh, of course, you’re the master! Come, I’ve prepared hot wine for you, in good old-fashioned style. Drink it at once. If you were to fall ill, it’s old Jacquine who would have to look after you again.’

The meal was quickly over. Jacquine made haste to clear the table.

‘I wish you a very good night, madame and monsieur,’ she said as she went. ‘I’m going to bed. It’s on the stroke of ten.’

Fanny rose.

‘Stop a moment longer,’ said Augustine. ‘We’ve a good half-hour yet.’

‘All right, I’ll stay. I don’t want to cut short my last visit.’

‘Your last visit?’

‘Before my departure—yes. I’ve sold all my exhibits, and have decided to travel for a few weeks—or months—in Holland. I came this evening to say good-bye to you.’

She watched the effect of her words. Augustine exclaimed:

‘If only I had known! Oh! Fanny, you wait till just as you’re going to tell me such news! How treacherous of you!’

'If you had known that you wouldn't see me for some weeks—or months—you wouldn't have told me to take the last train?'

'Is it quite decided? Are you going soon?'

'Soon. What a blessed relief for you, Augustine! No more letters, no more journeys to Paris, no more—surprises, such as to-night's! You'll recover your peace of mind. You ought to be thankful!'

'Why do you speak thus? You are leaving me; and I am genuinely sorry, although—still——'

'Speak your mind. Be brave for once!'

'Fanny, we are both going through a painful crisis. Our minds are continually at war. I suffer, and I know I make you suffer. Perhaps it would be for our ultimate happiness if we were to separate for a while. We can then have time for reflection. We shall be able to see clearly into our own hearts.'

'You're very accommodating. I was afraid of reproaches, suspicions—jealousy.'

'Jealousy? But you're going alone, Fanny?'

'Certainly. But as I have given out that I shall make a long stay at Amsterdam, to see the museums and the harbour, one—or several—friends will perhaps join me there.'

'Several friends?'

'One at least.'

'Monsieur Barral?'

'He or another; what does it matter to you?'

'But, Fanny, I have a right——''

'What right have you? I'm not your wife, and I'm scarcely your mistress! What would you say if I tried to order your life, and to find out what you are doing all these long days when I'm far from

you, and without news of you? Besides, if you don't want me to receive Monsieur Barral in Holland, come with me yourself!

'I?'

'Are you not free? But I have no intention of carrying you off by force, my friend. Just reflect——'

She went into the bedroom. Augustine followed her.

'What are you doing there? What are you looking for?'

'My hat and coat. I don't want to miss the last train. No, I don't want a light, don't disturb yourself, Augustine.'

He seized her violently.

'I don't want you to go away. Why do you say things that drive me mad? I want—oh!—I want——'

Their voices died down into a murmur.

Under the curtains, in the dark, clasped in his arms, she wept.

'Let me go! let me go! I ought not to have yielded. I am ashamed!'

'Why? I can't think why you are crying. Look at me! Answer me!'

'I am ashamed. I am disgusted with myself. Oh! why am I not far away from here?'

'Once more, I can't think——'

'You don't love me! You have never loved me!'

'Are you not in my arms? And but now——'

'Don't speak! Your kisses! They appal me, those kisses of yours. Yes, I am here because jealousy aroused memories in you, and desire for

my person awoke again. But afterwards—how your silence reproaches me! You detest me!’

‘Fanny!’

‘I am for you what alcohol was for old Faron: your vice. That shameful, degraded sort of vice which cannot be confessed. Go! I know! You shall deceive me no longer! You can deceive yourself no longer! No, no, you don’t love me! You never gave yourself wholly! There has always been something in you which was withheld from me—something intangible. And it’s just that I want, that alone! Let me go! Don’t touch me! Your hands, your lips, your contact—and not your love! Oh! it’s horrible!’

She uttered a despairing cry. Augustine half rose, and looked at her dusky wealth of hair, her white arms, her whole shuddering, tortured body, shaken by sobs.

‘It was your love I wanted! I thought I would deserve it by my patience and my tenderness. I have endured and forgiven all your coldness, your rebuffs, your shameful neglect of me. I have had to beg for your distantly worded letters, your brief visits, those conversations in which you trampled my feelings under foot. Have I wearied you with my presence? Have I wept before you? Have I not blessed you for those crumbs of love you threw me as an alms? Ah! indeed, I have not been proud! You always found me yielding and affectionate when you wanted me. What would I not have done for you? How utterly I gave myself to you! And I did it all because I hoped, by dint of loving you, to make myself beloved!’

She turned to Augustine, and struck his breast.

‘You have nothing there! nothing! I may endure agonies of grief: my despair is your revenge! I must expiate the sin we have committed. You think justice demands that I should be unhappy. Well, your wish is gratified: your God is avenged, your God triumphs! Since I have been your mistress you have not given me a single hour, a single minute, of true happiness. And now I have suffered enough! I can endure no more! It must end!’

‘Ah!’ he cried, ‘if only we could free ourselves from this hell! You say you’re not happy; do you think I am any happier than you? When I think of our dreams of last year! All is defiled and destroyed! I am bereft of my illusions and my courage! Look at me now! I am no longer myself! I am another man. My old friends cannot recognise me. And if only they saw into my heart!’

‘At last you dare to speak openly! You confess your cowardice and ingratitude! Well, I will deliver you from myself. Be penitent, my friend, and save your soul! don’t die in your sin, like old Faron. What am I in your life?—Sin! Defilement! Make your mind easy: I will leave you. You have long hoped for a rupture between us. I’ll begin my life over again. I’ll love whoever loves me. Don’t keep me! I want to go!’

Rage choked her. She spoke in broken, incoherent phrases.

• ‘Be quiet,’ said Augustine. ‘This is a shameful scene. Have some respect——’

‘Why did I ever meet you? Why did you come into my life? I should have loved George. I was

just beginning to love him. He knows it well enough, and he loves me still, and is waiting for me. Oh! you were not jealous! You never troubled yourself about what I might be saying or doing! How he implored me to love him the other evening in the carriage! I defended myself—kept myself for you! But he loved me, I know! His kisses were indeed the kisses of love——’

‘What do you mean?’

‘I’m no longer answerable to you. Let me go!’

He held her by both arms, so roughly that his fingers bruised the tender skin.

‘Where are you going at this time of night?’

‘Where you are not—where I can forget you——’

‘You saw Barral the other evening—in a carriage—you speak of kisses—explain yourself—I wish to know. Are you playing a trick on me by way of revenge? Are you——’

‘Let me go! you are hurting me! Well, yes, he loves me, he told me so——’

‘You encouraged him!’

‘Oh!’

‘You encouraged him! you provoked him! you dared him! You liked his attentions, didn’t you? You were alone at night. And you consented—you permitted——’

He held Fanny in his grasp, he crushed her against him, her face close to his. Frightened, she stammered:

‘You are hurting me. Don’t look at me like that.’

But the picture of George and Fanny, the picture of treachery and wantonness he conjured up, drove Augustine to fury and exasperation. Letting Fanny

go, his head fell back on the pillow, and he broke into spasmodic sobbing, which shook his entire frame.

She threw herself on him, and called him by name—frightened at what she had done.

‘Augustine! Forgive me. I swear to you I have done you no wrong. I struck the man——’

He pushed her away.

‘Go! You are worthy of each other. You knew what you were risking! You knew him well enough—your Barral!’

‘But——’

‘He was always prowling round you. You accepted his presence and his familiarities. You knew he wanted you. And the knowledge pleased you! You must have encouraged him. Ah! your Barral, your George—as you call him! I hated him instinctively the very first day I saw him! A fine lover, indeed—the very man for you! Oh! you whom I exalted in my mind, whom I thought so great, so pure, whom I—you, my Fanny!’

He wept. Then he was torn again by a storm of jealousy. He looked at his mistress with eyes of hatred. He broke into words of reproach.

She said quietly:

‘I give up trying to understand you. You forsake me for days and days. You turn a deaf ear to all my prayers. And because I obey your unexpressed wish, and try to go back to my former self, you overwhelm me with reproaches. What do you want?’

She made a last struggle, presaging victory this time. Seated on the bed, she thrust aside with both hands her heavy masses of dark hair, and both joy and despair shone from her eyes.

‘I must not stay here any longer. Let us give each other up without anger, for—you know it well—I have never wronged you. I was imprudent: I ought not to have risked a *tête-à-tête* with Barral, just because you had broken your word again, and I hadn’t the pluck to stay by myself and nurse my grief. But, I swear to you, I struck the man, and I have closed my door against him. For I love you and can love no one but you. You are dearer to me than life itself. But, since I am hateful to you, since I am the cause of your unhappiness and your sin, I must leave you.’

She knew well enough she would not leave him. Before her eyes, Augustine—crushed and conquered—was suffering the same martyrdom she had herself so long endured.

‘Good-bye.’

He threw himself in her way.

‘Stop! I was mad! Stop! Forgive me! I believe all you tell me; I will do as you wish. Oh! Fanny! I am so miserable! Forgive me! Comfort me! I have only you in all the world.’

‘But you wanted to free yourself from “this hell!” You drove me from you, you threw me into Barral’s arms!’

‘Don’t speak of the man again! He does not love you—no, indeed! It is I who love you! I tried to tear myself away from you! I forced myself to seem indifferent. Only this evening I appeared callous and unkind to you. Oh! Fanny! I come back to you. Give me back your priceless person! Give me back your lips! Recall past memories! Fanny! my own darling!’

His conflicting emotions overcame Augustine. Scruples, remorse, shame, all vanished. He was no longer master of himself.

She triumphed.

‘Do you love me?’

‘I love you.’

‘More than your salvation?’

‘More than my salvation.’

‘Even to mortal sin?’

‘Even to damnation, even to eternal death! Ah! to lose myself with you! to fall into an abyss—to think no more—to sleep—to die——’

‘Come! a night of love is worth more than an uncertain eternity. Your hands are cold! You are trembling all over!’

‘With happiness! I am inexpressibly happy. Ah! take me in your arms, speak to me. Send me to sleep. Your presence intoxicates me.’

‘Poor, poor child!’

‘Yes—a poor child, without strength or will—who suffers—who loves you.’

‘Be calm! Close your eyes. Forget. We are alone in the world. Nothing exists outside ourselves. The poppies are blossoming above us, and counsel us to sleep. Sleep!’

‘The poppies—yes—love, death.’

‘Why speak of death? We are young and full of life. Let us love!’

‘For ever!’

‘All night.’

‘All the nights of my life.’

‘You will never leave me again? You will follow me anywhere?’

'To the end of the world, beyond the world! Kiss me again. Destroy the memory of my unkindness, annihilate the past, give me slumber for the mind, rest for the heart, delightful dreams—forgetfulness.'

The church clock of Hautfort struck one after another the grey hours which herald the dawn. A faint ray of light penetrated between the closed shutters. The whistle of a train pierced the cold air of early morning. It was the time when Madame de Chanteprie, on her knees in her cell-like room, said Matins before the Christ with the outstretched arms.

XXIV

ONE Sunday morning, when mass was over, Mademoiselle Cariste came home in a very excited frame of mind. She exclaimed, as soon as she reached the threshold:

‘Brother! come here at once! Such a frightful thing—Monsieur de Chanteprie——’

The captain, in his little courtyard, was cleaning the rabbit-hutch. He hurried into the sitting-room, holding a struggling rabbit by the ears.

‘Augustine is dead?’

‘Would to God he were dead!’

Monsieur Courdimanche let go the rabbit, which scampered behind the valance of the sofa.

‘What do you mean, sister?’

‘Monsieur de Chanteprie is lost to us, to his poor sainted mother, and to our holy religion. He is leaving Old Hautfort, with that vile woman.’

‘How do you know?’

‘Mademoiselle Piédeloup heard from Mademoiselle Perdriel that Monsieur de Chanteprie had ordered a basket-trunk lined with oil-cloth, and divided into compartments, at the “Parisian Bazaar.” I don’t suppose he wants that for travelling from Neauphle to Rouvrenoir? Another, and a more serious fact, is that the creature has been at Chêne-Pourpre since Tuesday. The widow Giroux saw her go into the

Chantepries' garden by the little door. She meets Augustine there every evening. (A chaste blush overspread Mademoiselle Courdimanche's face.) She spends her nights at the summer-house.'

'What then!—it doesn't prove——'

'But she says (Mademoiselle Perdriel heard it from Mother Testard)—she says she is not going to live at Chêne-Pourpre this summer, and she will send tenants.'

'You are right, sister. They must be plotting something. Poor boy!'

Monsieur Courdimanche sat down.

'This is very sad news for me. No; I would never have believed it. If you only knew how Augustine tended Faron, and how generous and charitable he was!'

'That was his hypocrisy! He was making a fool of you. That woman has perverted and demoralised him. The priest says she is the Beast of Holy Writ.'

Mademoiselle Cariste uttered the words in a low tone. Her childlike mind was incapable of hatred, but her accent betrayed the virtuous horror of an old maid towards the woman who loves not wisely but too well. She reproached herself for having once received Fanny under her roof: and she could not but think that the humble sitting-room, with the green upholstered furniture and spotless curtains, had been defiled by her presence. An abandoned woman had sat on the velvet sofa in front of the pictures of the Sacred Heart and St. Joseph, and Mademoiselle Courdimanche had actually offered her the sloe gin she kept for the priests! How terrible to think of!

'I pity Monsieur de Chanteprie, but I can't forgive him for having brought his—mistress to our house.'

And Mademoiselle Cariste blushed again at uttering the word 'mistress.'

'I don't bear him any grudge for that, sister. He did it in good faith, poor boy. Ah! good God! what a trial! What is to be done? We can only pray for him—for them.'

'I would rather cut out my tongue than say an Ave for that creature.'

'That's not a Christian sentiment, sister.'

'Our Lord cursed him or her through whom the innocent perished.'

Noon struck. Mademoiselle Cariste made the sign of the cross, and whispered: 'Heart of Jesus, save me!'—the interjaculatory prayer which secured her fifty days' indulgence. Then she placed on the mantelpiece her prayer-book, bound in black leather, and illustrated by pious pictures, untied the strings of her hat, and drew off her washed and mended thread mittens.

'And supposing he marries her!' she said suddenly, turning to the captain. 'For it's marriage she's aiming at, no doubt!'

'Madame de Chanteprie will never consent. And Augustine is not twenty-five.'

'He is twenty-four and a half, brother. And the law would permit his marriage.'

'Supposing I were to go and see Madame Manolé? I could explain the situation to her, and appeal to her feelings and her sense of delicacy.'

'The feelings, the sense of delicacy of such a person! Brother, would you dare to go and see the

woman who lives openly with Monsieur de Chanteprie without being married to him! What would your guardian angel say!’

‘Very well! I will see Augustine.’

‘And I will see Madame de Chanteprie.’

‘Perhaps she knows through Jacqueline.’

‘Not likely! Jacqueline is in the creature’s pay. Sooner or later she’ll be packed out of the house, I can tell you.’

In the afternoon the captain, got up in his best, and wearing a hat that was almost new, called on Augustine. He hardly knew why he had dressed thus ceremoniously. Perhaps he feared that his old jacket and shabby felt hat would not befit the gravity of his mission.

But, at Augustine’s first words, he was distressed and disconcerted; he forgot the speech he had prepared so carefully on the way. Monsieur de Chanteprie confessed his intentions! He said, quietly and firmly, that he was about to make a journey to Holland.

‘Then it’s true that you are going away?’

‘I shall come back.’

‘Report says that you are going—with a woman.’

Augustine replied:

‘I did not know I was being spied upon; but it is of no consequence to me. Rumour tells the truth: I am going with a woman.’

‘My God! my God!’ gasped the old man.

He did not break into curses and anathemas. His simple heart was torn with grief for Augustine and his misfortune.

‘My dear child, you will surely take time for reflec-

tion. Before taking such a desperate step, you ought to consider your duty, your mother, and your God. I have not come here to scold you, and cause you suffering. I have always loved you dearly, my boy. We must be considerate towards one another, so that God may consider us. I—a sinner—could not condemn my brother, who is probably a better man than I: shall I condemn my son?’

‘I know you are the best of men, and that I am unworthy of your affection. But I cannot tell you everything. Forgive me. I must and will go. I have pledged my word. But, as I said before, I shall return.’

‘No,’ said the captain, ‘you will not return. No doubt, when you go, you will say “*au revoir*” in good faith. But when you have seen the world, found another country, and deadened your conscience—you won’t want to see Old Hautfort again. You are divesting yourself of your whole past life. You will have broken with everything here—both people and things. Besides, do you think she would let you come back?’

‘Don’t talk to me about her just now.’

‘Well, I don’t want to reproach her any more than you,’ replied Monsieur Courdimanche. ‘She is an unfortunate woman who lacks religion, just as you of late lack grace. I am sorry for her. I am sorry for you. But if I could see her, I would point out the wrong she has done you already, and the further wrong she is going to do you. I would advise her——’

‘She would not even listen to you. She and I have both lost our reason and our liberty, Monsieur

Courdimanche. We are lost souls, possessed with the demon of love——'

'You have sunk as low as that! you, our little Augustine, the pure and pious child, who used to dream of apostleship and martyrdom! You are now a woman's degraded slave! What would Monsieur Forgerus say? What sorrow for that holy man, if he saw your fall!'

'Monsieur Forgerus himself could do nothing for me. He must lament my ingratitude, for I have neither written to him, nor heard from him, since the autumn. Ah! my poor old friend, don't waste your emotion in arguments which would be cruel to both of us, and perfectly useless. I have struggled against my passion. I have treated the woman I loved as an enemy. But I am conquered: I am broken. Leave me!'

'Ah! that woman has ruined you!' exclaimed Monsieur Courdimanche, overcome with grief.

Augustine said, with a smile that seemed terrible to the old man:

'You see in me a happy lover. It is love that has brought about my misfortune—my fall.'

The captain rose with indignation:

'Love! You are not worthy to utter such a word! Love is a gift from God, a reflection of the divine charity. I have loved. You have heard my story: I was no longer young: I was living a selfish, almost heathen, life, when I met a simple, pious young girl—an angel! I married her. God took her from me. I loved her as much as you can possibly love your Fanny. Well! love saved me from the sin of despair; love gave me strength to live, and

the hope of finding her again in Heaven! Love drove me to care for the poor; it made me understand their worth! What should I have been without love? A besotted old soldier, absorbed in his hobbies, his infirmities, his whist, and his absinthe. Instead of which, I am a happy man, full of hope and faith: in short, a Christian. Tell me now, what is it that you call "love"?'

'I cannot answer you. Let me suffer alone.'

'Then—good-bye.'

Augustine said, in a hollow voice:

'You are right: I shall not return. Weep for me as for a child who is dead. Good-bye! I shall not forget that, alone amongst all, and after all had forsaken me, you loved me.'

Monsieur Courdimanche had scarcely left the summer-house when Fanny arrived, uneasy in mind.

'Some one has been here,' she said; and her eyes wandered round the room as if to discover a lurking enemy. 'Some one has been disturbing you, Augustine.'

'Captain Courdimanche has just left.'

'I suppose he has been telling you how scandalous your conduct is. His talk has worked on your feelings. You almost found it in your heart to regret.'

'You are very unkind with your suppositions and allusions, your indirect reproaches and looks of disapproval! For days past, you have been calling me to account about everything. I am ready to follow you. I approve of all you do. I give up my own will. And yet you are not satisfied!'

She thought sadly that Augustine's docility and passivity were not the joyful complaisance of love, but a species of avoidance of all decision or responsibility.

But she refrained from expressing her thoughts aloud, for fear of the consequences.

'Let's grant that I'm not myself—that I'm somewhat distracted,' she said, forcing a smile. 'Happiness frightens me. Stupid presentiments take hold of me, ever so many times a day. I never come here without saying to myself: 'Perhaps it's the last time.' And when I am beside you at night I cannot sleep. I look at you, and I begin to wish that we could both die together at once.'

'You can't be quite yourself, dear. I must reassure you: in a week my lawyer at Rambouillet will send me an agent whom I will instal at Testard's, at Chêne-Pourpre.'

'An agent to manage your property? But you will come back to Hautfort, after our trip. Is it worth while to appoint an agent?'

'Don't let us lie to ourselves. Come back? With you? Impossible. Without you? I shall no longer have strength to leave you! Return to my solitary life, tormented with sorrow and jealousy, deprived of spiritual aid? Ah! Fanny! it would be very rash of you to let me come back!'

She murmured:

'What have I done? I have brought trouble into your heart and into your life. Can I make you happy? Ah! if you could only have loved me, I would not have wanted to change our way of

life! And at this moment I am almost inclined to say: "Stay! Let us live as before."

'As before! So that a Barral may take advantage of your spleen? So that one evening when you are alone and bored——'

'Augustine! You insult me!'

'No; we are bound to each other by the strongest ties—those which cannot be confessed. Our love is no longer an idyll, a dream of youth, nor even a need of our hearts—It is—Ah! to love you "as before" indeed! After what you have taught me!'

The agent, Monsieur Dussaux, was installed at Chêne-Pourpre, in a little house belonging to Testard's farm. And the whole countryside knew of Monsieur de Chanteprie's approaching departure.

The bristling virtue of the citizens and the petty spite of the peasantry joined forces against the 'unnatural son' and the 'bad woman.' The Testards, obliged to give up the little dwelling to the agent—who, thin and alert, fastidious and ill-tempered, watched them closely—no longer restrained their feelings. Vittelot's wife spat in the road when she met the Parisian. Filthy inscriptions defaced the walls of the 'Three Limes.' Primed by Mademoiselle Courdimanche, and afraid of losing their pious customers, the seamstresses and laundresses of Hautfort refused Fanny their services.

One day, the Vittelot child, lying in ambush behind a hedge, threw dirt on Madame Manolé's gown. She boxed the urchin's ears. Hearing him bawl, his mother ran out, and threatened with the police 'the trollop who was everybody's property,

and who murdered poor people's children.' Monsieur Dussaux rescued Fanny from the shrew. After this episode Augustine was afraid to leave her alone at the 'Three Limes,' exposed to all the ill-nature of her neighbours. He advised her to leave the place first, without telling any one beforehand, and await him in Paris. A week would suffice him to put his affairs in order; in a week he would rejoin her.

'Can't I say good-bye to the Abbé Vitalis? I dare not go to the presbytery.'

'He is, like ourselves, surrounded by spies. I know an anonymous letter about him has been sent to the bishop. Don't run the risk of compromising Vitalis. I will write to him——'

'So we are pestiferous persons—outcasts! But we do no harm to any one. What a frightful place! What dreadful people!'

'Yes, indeed! It's the same here as everywhere else. Fools and cowards, under colour of defending morality, attack an unprotected woman. And I cannot defend you here. Soon, at my side, you will fear no one.'

'In a week you will be in Paris?'

'I swear it!'

'On your honour?'

'On my honour.'

'Very well! I'll obey you. I trust you.'

The evening before her departure, they went for a walk through the country round Rouvrenoir. A white sky, compact of sunshine and mist, hovered over the tops of the hills and the delicate ultramarine of the plains. The fields were decked with

the simple anemone and the yellow cuckoo-flower, the first-born blossoms of the new spring. As in the days when their pure love dawned, clusters of pale blue, scentless violets adorned the roadsides. Flocks of crows followed the plough; and restlessness, desire, expectation—all the voices of the season found expression in the languorous cooing of the wood-pigeons.

Augustine and Fanny prolonged their adieux amid these beloved surroundings, which they would never see again, and which would soon be invested with the dim, immutable beauty of a memory only. The passionate heart of the woman, but yesterday absorbed in the happiness of the future, was now given over to contemplation of the past, which she longed inexpressibly to revive. As twilight advanced a shower of rain pattered down on the newly opened foliage; grey, light-fringed clouds, through which penetrated the last rays of the setting sun, were piled up in the west. Fanny and Augustine took shelter in the dismantled bedroom at the 'Three Limes'; and she, clasped in his arms, was absorbed in silent dreams.

He, melancholy as were his thoughts as he sat with his face touching hers, felt for the first time a man's pride in protecting the beloved one. He dreamed of beginning his life over again, of raising his amorous bondage to the level of a noble love.

- 'We have suffered,' he said, 'we may still cause each other suffering, but all the happiness that human love can give—imperfect and sorrow-fraught as it is—I will give you, my darling.'

And Fanny answered:

'I am afraid now of being too happy. Ah! if only this moment could last for ever!'

Towards midnight Monsieur de Chanteprie withdrew. He wanted Fanny to have some rest, for Jacquine was coming for her with the carriage before daybreak. She begged in vain.

'Let me at least go a little way with you.'

'So that a belated drunkard—a Vittelot—may meet you coming home alone? No, my darling, be reasonable; shut yourself up in the house and don't stir. Jacquine will want me to put the horse to. She will be here about five, and to-morrow your persecutors will find your doors closed. Go and rest, my Fanny.'

It was a mild, misty, moonlit night, though somewhat damp. The black shadows looked like pools of ink at the foot of the lime-trees, and on the white walls of the house the vine-shoots traced a pattern as clearly defined as if it had been painted in sepia. The ground was very damp. On the outskirts of the little wood a frog was calling its mate with a clear, rhythmical note.

'A week,' said Augustine, 'and I shall be with you, to spend my whole life with you. A whole life! It's a long lease, my love. Ah! you dear little fool, so eager for joy that you can't sacrifice a moment of to-day's happiness, for the sake of the more certain happiness of to-morrow! Dear little fool, living in the present like a child!'

'The present alone exists, Augustine. Yesterday is no more; and what will to-morrow be? We may die before the dawn. Stay! Oh, stay! Don't let us run any more risks! See! I am holding you;

I am holding in my arms all my happiness—so long pursued, so painfully acquired. And should I let go my hold now?’

Clinging to her lover, she besought him, looking pale as death in her long grey gown. Her forehead was like marble, crowned with its dusky wealth of hair. Her brilliant teeth gleamed between her lips as she opened them for a last entreaty, and her face, her attitude, her words, took on at this moment something of the supernatural. Standing by the closed gate, she looked like an angel in woman’s guise, a spirit of darkness and of light, staying a man on the threshold of paradise.

Augustine kissed the hands which detained him, and gently thrust them from him.

‘If you love me, Fanny, go in! Sleep as trustfully and calmly as if I were at your side.’

Lip to lip, they embraced.

‘Good-bye, my dear love, good-bye!’

She repeated ‘Good-bye!’ in an unsteady voice, and without word or movement watched Augustine depart.

At the bend of the road, on the crest of the hill, he turned round to look at her once more. Leaning against the gate, silent and motionless, the folds of her light gown falling straight to her feet, bathed in moonlight, she was already far away—she was but a phantom.

XXV

ON her knees on the study floor Jacqueline was piling up in a basket the old Jansenist books with their marbled edges and bindings of brown pigskin or calf, which bore the *ex libris* of Gaston de Chanteprie. The lattice doors of the bookcase disclosed almost empty shelves.

'These too, Jacqueline.'

Augustine placed the *Conferences of Mother Angélique* on the top of the *Moral Essays* of Nicole, and the *Theological Instructions on the Knowledge of Salvation*. And, to steady the shaking pile of books, he put to one side of them the *Frequent Communion* of Antoine Arnauld, priest, and, on the other, the great volume of the *Augustinus (Cornelii Iansenii episcopi iprensis Augustinus, seu doctrina sancti Augustini, MDCXXXI.)*

'It's a strange idea of your mother's—getting these books from you. Is she afraid of the mice? But what about the others?'

Jacquine pointed to the lower shelves of the bookcase.

'My uncle Adhémar's books? The *Encyclopædia*, Diderot, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Voltaire? Where could they be better stored than in this summer-house? I don't believe they have been touched for the last hundred years.'

The servant, straightening her back, rose to her

feet, and went away, the basket on her hip. Augustine reached down the envelopes of yellow paper which contained Gaston's classified and dated letters, and his unfinished manuscripts. Each name mentioned in these writings brought before his mind's eye a humble or a famous figure—a magistrate in his robes, a recluse in his grey habit, a nun with waxlike complexion and close white bands. He did not stop to think of them—those shadowy beings whom maternal piety had made real to him even from his cradle, and whom he had constituted the witnesses and judges of his life. How many times, at solemn crises, had he felt their approbation or their disapproval!

An envelope fell open; some sheets of paper slipped from it; a written name arrested Augustine's attention. He read:

'On the 14th of May there died here my cousin Etienne de Chanteprie, after thirteen or fourteen months' retirement in this desert. He was a well-favoured man, and a man of parts, having much acquaintance with Latin and literature. Often indeed he exercised his wit in the making of some poetical conceit, and his heart, puffed up with the pride of this world, found great satisfaction in this pastime.

'Through much frequenting of evil company, he forgot for a season the good principles which had been instilled into him while he was yet of tender years. Almost was he taken in the toils of a damsel whose great desire was to wed him. His looseness of life was a source of great affliction to Monsieur

de Chanteprie, my good father, but Monsieur de Saci said it was scarce possible "to put an old head on young shoulders."

'But, having come to see me at Port-Royal, my cousin testified some inclination towards reflection and meditation. He was filled with wonderment at seeing a company of people chosen by God from all eternity, assembled in this school of penitence, having turned their swords into spades and their pens into reaping-hooks. His partially opened eyes perceived the true greatness which lay concealed under this lowly exterior. But the world, eager to retain so prized a victim, held him bound as it were by chains of gold. His soul, already touched by divine grace, was yet ravished by greed of knowledge and by carnal love. . . . Thrice blessed art Thou, my God, who didst break the bonds of fleshly love and set free this precious soul, by showing him how unworthy was the object which he was so deluded as to prefer to Thee!

'My cousin, broken-hearted at discovering the vileness of her on whom he had placed his carnal affections, took refuge with Monsieur Le Maistre, and craved leave to establish himself among us. Monsieur de Saci and Monsieur Singlin made trial of his resolution by causing him to wait many days before his prayer was granted. At last, Monsieur de Saci, yielding to his importunities, took upon himself the guidance of his conduct.

'My cousin, whose parts had distinguished him even amongst courtiers, craved permission to take the office of forest-keeper. He walked daily in the mire, enduring extreme cold with a coarse linen

garment as his sole protection, only drawing it closer around him with a cord when the cold increased. He dwelt in a hut over the cellar appertaining to the monastery garden. This hut is named the "Petit-Pallu." I had wellnigh forgotten to remark that he applied himself also to languages, thus joining labour of the mind to that of the body. But, his humility knowing no bounds, he feared lest vanity should destroy in him the effects of penitence, should he compose any work in the French language. It became necessary, for reasons of convenience, that he should yield up his office as forester. Then he found employment in the kitchen, with Monsieur d'Eragny, a gentleman from Le Vexin, and later on he transcribed the works of the other recluses, his handwriting being fine and clear.

'He died of the same malady as the Sieur Jacques Lindo. A sudden drowsiness overcame him, after that he had been three or four times seized with a tertian fever. Monsieur de Saci visited and exhorted him daily. I have never seen a man die more calmly. His simplicity and Christian gentleness drew tears from the good Monsieur Pallu, our physician. As soon as his malady appeared dangerous, the holy sacrament was administered to him. He received it with many tears and sighs, repeating the daily petitions which the recluses have added to their morning prayers :

"Give me grace, O God, to be of the number of Thine elect!"

"Give me grace to be worthy of Thy holy mercies!"

"Give me grace to live and die repentant!"

'Horror for his sins was always present to his mind, but so also was the infinite mercy of God—that

mercy which is never greater than when it sheds its comforting balm on the sorrow caused by great iniquity. Thus died this worthy servant of Jesus Christ, cut off in the flower of his manhood by his works of penance, which he carried to the utmost limits of endurance. He was interred in the outer choir, twenty feet beyond the screen, deplored by the sisters and the hermits, whom he had served with unexampled meekness. A fast, or nine days' abstinence, was observed for the completion of his penance, and the welfare of his soul.'

The whole evening Augustine remained bent over the manuscripts with their faded, yellow ink. He went to bed very late, and, after a brief, uneasy slumber, awoke about midnight.

Stretched on his back, with wide open eyes, he passed in review the acts of the drama whose *dénouement* he felt was now approaching: the first meeting with Fanny, the dinner at the Courdimanches, the virtuous young girl who seemed so vulgar and unattractive, the abandonment of the marriage which would have changed his whole destiny. Then—love—disguised at first under the semblance of a wholly spiritual regard; the confession, Fanny's wish to be converted, her unaccountable resistance to the truth, his gradual seduction and fall. He began to think that Fanny's unbelief was not the effect of ignorance, but of wilful blindness, and that her rebellious soul, obstinately prejudiced as it was against Catholic morals and dogma, had given up the struggle through the influence of some sinister agency. Chance alone had not brought this being into Augustine's life, fully equipped for her work of

ruin and destruction. Doubtless she had been prompted by the arch-rebel, the author of all temptations.

The idea of diabolical agency haunted Monsieur de Chanteprie, fascinated him like a fixed point amid the delusions of feverish and fitful slumber. 'I must be going out of my mind,' he thought with alarm; 'I'm raving. Fanny loved me tenderly.' Why did the memory of his early love become dim, and melt into nothingness? Other memories forced themselves upon him, and stood out from their shadowy background in bright and living relief. Augustine's temples throbbed; vague noises sounded in his ears; his sick fancy conjured up ghoulish feminine monsters, which somehow resembled Fanny. And suddenly Augustine felt that *some one* was in the room. Not daring to stir, he uttered an inarticulate cry of terror. An instant—an eternity—went by. He seemed to feel a phantom touch, to be conscious of the silent flight of the Invisible.

The light of a dull day was creeping up over the ceiling of the room when Augustine regained consciousness of things real. The door was slamming to and fro. Half dressed, he hastened to the study. The wind had blown the window open, and the rain-water which had collected on the balcony was flowing in in a long black stream.

'What a horrible night!' thought the young man. 'The wind, blowing in through the door, must have stirred my curtains, and so I thought an invisible being was crouched in the darkness, watching me. Ah! what hideous faces and voices I saw and heard during those terrible hours!'

The displaced and dusty articles of furniture no

longer wore their familiar aspect. The soul of the dwelling was departing before its master. Monsieur de Chanteprie approached the window and looked at the big house of stone and brick visible between the lime-trees of the grove.

‘How I loved everything—the house, the garden, the hills encircling the broad plain, the roofs of the old town—even the grass between the paving-stones! I can only see my earliest years through a dim mist, as one sees the lilies on the altar through a cloud of incense. How pure and peaceful was my life! Oh, my childhood, so colourless through having been spent in the shadow of the past! Oh, my youth, deceived by a vision of celestial love! Farewell, phantoms of myself! Where is now the son of Thérèse-Angélique, the beloved pupil of Monsieur Forgerus? The House of the Poppy is about to sink once more into its charmed slumber. Augustine de Chanteprie is now only a shade amid its shades.’

With bare breast, and hair moist with the drizzling rain, he cooled his fevered hands on the wet iron of the balcony. Suddenly the bell for first mass sounded from the steeple of Hautfort: ‘The five o’clock mass, the servants’ mass.’ He saw again the ill-lighted chapel, the sleepy-eyed altar-boy, the congregation composed of servants and poor women, Captain Courdimanche standing in a corner, and the little girls from the industrial school in their blue capes. The candles twinkle. An old woman spells out below her breath the words in her prayer-book. It is as if God draws near and bends down to listen to her.

‘O Lord!’ murmured Augustine, ‘these are the widows and orphans, the poor in spirit whom Thou

lovest: theirs are the lowly minds which Thou dost enlighten with the power of Thy gospel alone. Listen, I pray Thee, to these voices raised towards Thee in worship, in the cold grey hours of early morn. They pray for those who pray not: for the rich man sleeping in his fast shut room; for the wretch whom the dawn of a new day only terrifies; for the dying man who struggles all night against the dread angel, and who finally gives in, and stretches his weary frame in a last long rest: for all humanity beginning over again the daily fight for life, and for myself—a sinner!’

The resonant summons of the bell was too much for his sick brain and shattered nerves. Returning to his room, he tried to sleep again. But remembrance of Fanny pursued him, and she seemed to him now but the embodiment of carnal desire—a being of whom he could only think with a shudder of disgust.

‘For this then have I paid the price of my salvation! The Idol I placed on the altar of my heart—it is thus she appears in the eyes of the saints, despoiled of the attractions lent her by fleshly lust! Why didst Thou create her, O God, if not to prove my patience, strength, and fidelity! An object of Thy special grace from my mother’s womb, I expected to enjoy Thy gifts without deserving them. I thought myself invincible before I had fought my battles. A mere presumptuous child, I had not the strength to recognise the temptress and baffle her wiles. I have defiled my immortal soul and my body of resurrection. On the rack of torture or at the martyr’s stake I would have confessed thee, O God! In the arms of a woman I have denied Thee!’

‘O God, whom I love, Thou knowest that my lips have uttered blasphemy—my lips alone, and not my heart. Even under Fanny’s kisses, this heart of mine yearned for Thee. O Thou, whom I have lost, O Light that is now veiled from me, O Thou whom I long for beyond and above all! It is my punishment that I cannot live either with Thee or without Thee! I will praise Thee, O my God, I will bless Thee, I will love Thee even in my sin, even in death, even in the fires of Gehenna! Ah! how my soul cries out for Thee! how I hunger and thirst for Thee! How blessed would it be to be raised up, purified, healed! Regard not my iniquity: deal with me according to Thy mercy, and not according to Thy justice. Naked, wounded, dying, I drag myself at the roadside, in all the mire of my impurity. Come, O good Samaritan! strengthen me with Thy grace! Pour oil and wine on my wounds!—No!—turn away Thy face—Leave me, O Lord! I am not worthy—I am not worthy.’

For a long while he gave vent thus to his misery. What did he ask of his God? What did he hope for? He knew not. He knew not even that he prayed. His tears poured forth like blood from a wound. How long did he remain prostrate in the semi-darkness? After the lapse of hours, he was still kneeling before his bed, his head on the pillow. Outside it was broad daylight. Birds were twittering. The sounds of life in the town could be heard, and some one was coming with slow and heavy steps up the stairs of the summer-house.

Augustine opened the door which gave on the landing. An old, bald-headed, grey-bearded man seized him in his arms. It was Monsieur Forgerus.

XXVI

'IT'S four o'clock, madame, and the gentlemen have been shut up in the summer-house ever since lunch. I knocked at the door just now, but Monsieur Forgerus called out: "By and by! Leave us for the present!" Is Monsieur Forgerus going to stay here? Shall I get a room ready for him? It's a queer notion of his, dropping in on people like this without any sort of warning! And you're waiting for him in this damp room, where there's been no fire since Christmas. You'll be ill.'

'Be quiet! I want to rest,' said Madame Angélique.

'I should think so! Monsieur Forgerus kept you talking long enough! Ah! here he comes. And late enough too——'

Anxiety and hatred shot from Jacquine's eyes, as she disappeared to make way for Monsieur Forgerus. The old tutor did not even look at the servant. He entered the drawing-room deliberately, and closed the door behind him.

Madame de Chanteprie was seated in an armchair beside the fireplace, her afflicted limbs supported by a footstool.

'Come, monsieur,' she said, 'and sit down near me. You have seen my son, and spoken with him. Tell me all.'

Monsieur Forgerus adjusted his spectacles on his

nose. In the clear light from the window, he looked as if the years had scarcely touched him, and his aquiline face bore the old intrepid expression.

‘Well!’ he said. ‘I have come in time. The danger is great, madame, but, thank God, all is not yet lost.’

‘What! may we hope?’

Words failed Madame Angélique. Her eyelids, destitute of lashes, veiled her colourless eyes. Monsieur Forgerus continued:

‘This morning, after our long and painful conversation, I went to the summer-house. The bedroom shutters were closed. I went in: there was no one—no sound. I went upstairs: suddenly Augustine came out of his room. He found himself in my arms.

‘I must confess, madame, that at that first moment I almost forgot the part I had to play. Augustine and I were both moved to tears, and unable to hear each other speak. I quickly drew him into the study. Gradually we recovered ourselves; I looked at Augustine, and saw that he was no longer the youth whose image I had treasured in my memory. A man stood beside me—a man whom I knew to be sick in mind, and perhaps sick in body too, a man whom I could no longer love as a son, but as a brother.

‘He seemed to realise that I knew all. He appeared stiff and constrained. Not wishing to pretend that my arrival was miraculous, I told the simple truth: how you summoned me by letter last January, when I was away for my health, after a serious illness; how I received your letter on my

return; and how an exchange of telegrams had hurriedly decided me to come, in spite of Monsieur de Grandville's remonstrances. "So you didn't come by chance? You had been told? My mother was expecting you?" he said. "Yes, certainly," I replied, "and I corresponded with her by telegraph, through the medium of Mademoiselle Courdimanche. Your Jacquine was suspected, my dear boy—suspected of complicity, at least." He turned aside his head: "Since you are so well informed, you know of course that it's too late." "I know that you are very unhappy," I answered, "and that I have come to save you. Can you tell me, face to face, that you are not unspeakably, terribly unhappy?" I held his hands. He tried to avoid my look. Oh! his poor, thin, haggard face!

Madame de Chanteprie murmured:

'Did he tell you he was going away, with—that woman?'

'I asked him the question boldly. Augustine replied by incoherent and contradictory words. He is afraid of some kind of evil influence for this woman, if he gives her up just now.—And yet he speaks of a moral crisis—a supreme warning from God. His heart is in a state of tumult and disorder. To tell the truth, I believe he has already more than once been inclined to revert to his former self; but his heart cannot endure the thought of the immediate rupture which would be necessary. He loves this woman.'

'He loves her!' cried Thérèse-Angélique. 'What do you mean, monsieur? I really begin to fear that Augustine is deceiving even you by his sentimental tricks and romantic talk. I know my son: he may

have fallen a victim to that physical weakness in which men resemble the brutes. But that he should love a mistress, love her with all his heart and soul, as he has not loved even me—his mother—as one should only love one's God! No, monsieur, that I can never believe. One does not love what one despises—and what you call a weakness of the heart is but the triumph of the Beast!

'Do you think so, madame?' said Forgerus, astonished at Madame Angélique's bitter looks and words. 'I have no very intimate acquaintance with those weaknesses of the heart from which it has pleased God to preserve me. But I have learned of them through the experience of others. The devil secures his coarser victims by means of the coarse snares of vice; but in order to make the pure-minded ones his own, he lays subtle and invisible traps, even in the very rites of religion, even in the yearnings of the soul towards apostleship and martyrdom. He tempts these enlightened, wary, over-scrupulous souls by means of the only vices which resemble virtues. When your son first made Madame Manolé's acquaintance, he saw in her—not a victim to be seduced, but a soul to be saved; and even now that his love has become so base a thing, he still thinks of her poor, lost, wandering, tarnished soul: "What will become of her, into what depths will she fall, if I abandon her?" It is not merely the cry of instinctive jealousy. I tell you, it is Augustine's heart which is holding him back. A mistaken sense of duty binds him to his fellow-sinner. We must destroy this dangerous illusion of his. And it's not an easy task. The step pro-

posed must seem to him odious, cowardly, and inhuman.'

Tears moistened the parchment-like cheeks of Thérèse-Angélique—tears of sorrow and of anger flowing from eyes which had never wept before.

'Ah!' she exclaimed, 'I had no idea that he loved her so! Such incredible idolatry fills me with horror, and I suffer more at this moment, monsieur, than I have ever suffered before. Good God! why did my parents force me into marriage, in spite of my terror and repugnance? Was I unworthy of the cloister? Alas! I was a woman, and I became a mother: I conceived with my unworthy body this son whom I hoped to see so strong, so pure. For many a long year I beheld him unsullied, as at his baptism. I dreamt of being a new Monica to this new Augustine. But God is chastening the mother's pride as He chastened the pride of the virgin. That which comes forth from the mire returns to the mire: the son of woman returns to woman.'

Weeping, and torn with emotion, Madame de Chanteprie forgot the austere modesty which had always closed her lips before Monsieur Forgerus. She revealed the sorrow of her life, the incurable wound which still bled after twenty years of widowhood, and which the mysterious consolations of religion had not succeeded in healing.

Suddenly she dried her eyes.

'My grief overcomes me. Forgive me,' she said to the old man, who was both grieved and astonished at her outburst. 'It's not a question of what my life has been, or might have been. I praise God for

His ways with me, although I do not understand them. But my son! what is to become of my son? He must be saved at any cost; this woman must be torn from his heart, even if it kill him a thousand times over! I value his salvation more than his life.'

'But I repeat, madame, that all is not yet lost! The ways of God are not our ways, and what seems to us an obstacle to His grace often becomes its very instrument. Holiness proceeds from corruption just as the flowers and fruits of the earth proceed from the dunghill. Exceptional virtue is often the result of exceptional repentance.'

'I know that, and I know too that out of the corrupt mass of the sons of Adam, God chooses both instruments of glory and instruments of perdition; I know that He dispenses justice to all, and mercy to a few; but which of us would dare hope for salvation, or believe that He will be dealt with according to love instead of justice? Ah! monsieur, it is only too true that evil habits may change one's nature entirely, and that the impression made by sin lasts for ever in the immortal soul. Grace alone can bestow the will and the power to do good. Grace!' (Madame Angélique uttered the word as Gaston de Chanteprie might have uttered it, with awe and reverence). 'Grace alone can save my unhappy son; but if grace is refused him——'

'It is a fearful mystery, which one can only think of with dumb wonderment,' interrupted Monsieur Forgerus. 'But let us not be hasty, madame. These portraits which surround us seem to be listening to our discussion, and to utter words of despair: the

shadow of Port-Royal is upon us. Let us take care lest we read St. Augustine too much and the Gospel too little. The Master rewards the labourer who only comes to Him at the eleventh hour; the Father welcomes the prodigal son, and the angels rejoice more over one sinner that repenteth than over ninety and nine just persons. I dare affirm this much: I perceive in your son's past life, and even in his present condition, striking signs of God's predestination. It is wonderful that the spirit of curiosity and of vain knowledge has not shaken his faith: it is wonderful that carnal love has not deadened his conscience. Be of good cheer, madame, and allow me to repeat to you what a holy bishop said to the sorrowing mother of Augustine: 'It is impossible that a son wept for with such tears as yours should perish eternally.'

Thus, and at greater length, did Monsieur Forgerus exhort Madame Angélique. She was calmer when he left her, saying:

'To-morrow—perhaps even this evening—I will bring your son to your knees.'

He rapidly ascended the stairs of the summer-house. Monsieur de Chanteprie, seated before the open desk, was reading a letter by the last rays of the setting sun.

'I left you disposed to do what is right,' said the old tutor affectionately. 'You have reflected and prayed. I am sure your mind must be more at ease. Your mother has prayed too—and she is waiting. Do you understand?'

The young man was silent.

‘Don’t you want to see her? She is very ill. Her mind remains clear and courageous, but her body must soon give way. Do you know how ill she is?’

‘I do.’

‘And your mother’s life seems to you of less importance than the fancied happiness of a stranger?’

‘When I was a child I worshipped my mother with all my heart. But for years past she has lived a separate life, apart from me. I am ashamed to confess it, but the bonds of filial love have become relaxed. My mother inspires me with more respect than love. I have accustomed myself to seek affection and loving care—elsewhere.’

‘And so?’

‘And so—would you have me lie to my mother, so as to console her and prolong her life?’

‘Lie to her—no!’ said Forgerus, aghast; ‘but—after your reception of me this morning, and what you confided to me, I thought I could count on you. Augustine, there is something wrong! Your face, and your embarrassed manner, make me suspect——’

‘Read this—then perhaps you’ll understand better what I am suffering.’

Monsieur Forgerus took the letter. It was a heartfelt supplication, the genuine cry of true love, which he could recognise in spite of never having known it himself. It discomfited him altogether. Out of Augustine’s confessions, Madame Angélique’s anathemas, and Captain Courdimanche’s simple story, he had constructed a strange, unreal picture of Madame Manolé, which presented her as a combination of the adventuress and the breaker of men’s hearts.

‘Evidently,’ thought he, ‘she is cleverer, and more sincere too, than I thought. And why should she not be sincere? She loves Augustine with that imaginative and yet sensual tenderness which makes young men fall desperately in love. She is indeed well armed for the fray!’

He placed the letter on the lowered lid of the desk, among others written on grey paper, in the same firm handwriting, with its beautifully formed capitals.

‘Those are other letters from her; in fact all her letters, which you are reading over again—isn’t it so? You were seeking excuses for your shortcomings.’

‘I have prayed,’ said Augustine; ‘I have prayed with tears and sighs, and I have prayed in silence. In all humility I have made known my hurt, and asked that I might be healed. Already—was it a delusion of my pride?—it seemed to me that my soul, steeped though it was in vice, was making a feeble, uncertain movement towards God. It was as if gentle hands were laid on my irresolute mind, urging it in the right direction, in spite of many deviations to one side or the other. In fact, during this temporary calm, I almost thought an inward work was going on in me—the approach, or at all events, the promise, of grace. I wished to begin my expiatory sacrifice at once. And it did not seem to me impossible, with God’s help, to live in penitence, far removed from her whom I felt to be so far from me.’

‘And then?’

‘And then, this letter came.’

‘And your seeming remorse, your seeming repentance, the beneficial crisis you speak of—all amounted to nothing more than a barren inclination. This morning your sin filled you with horror. The day is but now drawing to a close, and already, at heart, you return to your wallowing in the mire.’

‘But I cannot give her up!’ cried Augustine. ‘You have read what she says. She is expecting me. She calls on me. I promised. She has nothing in the world but my love! And you want me to say to her: “Go! suffer, weep, go to your ruin if you will, whilst I save my soul!” What would she think of me? I should be responsible for any folly she might commit in her despair. No! Not thus—not so quickly! Give me a little time. I will see her: I will prepare her gently for our separation. I will make her understand that I am obeying a divine command, but that the best of my heart is still hers, that I love her still, that I shall always love her. If I left her abruptly, she would think me a cowardly hypocrite, and fancy that my repentance was only a cloak for some other design—’

‘You would see her again; she would hold out her arms to you, and—No, do not lie to yourself! At least admit frankly that you are wavering. Confess that you regret a guilty pleasure, and that you are saying to God: “Bestow on me, I pray Thee, the gift of continence—but not just yet!”’

‘There are other things in love besides sensuality. Affection—’

‘Yes; affection for a sister-soul! You know where that leads to! The sentimental snare is a work of the devil, just like the sensual snare. When

you met Madame Manolé you were pure in mind and body, free from any voluptuous memory. And yet you fell! Now the habit of sinning fills your mind with guilty thoughts, which the mere presence of your mistress would suffice to revive. Dare you tell me that you are strong enough, sure enough of yourself, to risk such a test—to see this woman again, merely as a friend?’

‘You speak only of myself, but I think only of her. Who will protect her against the evil suggestions of misery and despair?’

‘She is a sinner like you: it is right that she should be punished.’

‘Through me—who love her?’

‘Through you—whom she has corrupted. Yes,’ continued Monsieur Forgerus severely, ‘you must give up your concern on her behalf. If God wills her salvation, He will save her easily enough without you. If He wills her damnation, your own sins will fall back on her head. You tremble at the thought of the tears she will shed—tears of wounded pride, of frustrated desire? My child, women’s tears are quickly dried. Their loves, violent as the storm, pass by like the storm; and nothing remains of them but the ravages they have caused. Your Fanny will be resigned. And besides, what is a woman’s disappointment in comparison with the anger of God?’

‘She will be resigned?—what do you know about it? She loves me.’

‘She is a widow—is she not?—and a widow who has succeeded very well in consoling herself? She is not a woman of one love.’

Augustine shuddered.

'Ah! what are you saying? If I were to give her up, I would not have her belong to any one after me. But she is beautiful. I know more than one man who wants her. That Barral! And I should be throwing her into his arms myself!'

He rose abruptly, and shut the lid of the desk with a bang, as if he would break it.

'I beg of you—don't let us speak of her any more. I am not in a condition to listen to you.'

XXVII

MADAME DE CHANTEPRIE, by way of honouring her guest, had had the evening meal served in the dining-room of the big house. Augustine and Monsieur Forgerus dined *tête-à-tête*.

The old man talked placidly about his college at Beyrouth, and gave an account of his last journey.

'You will have your old room,' said Augustine, interrupting the story, to which he was not listening. 'I have sent to Monsieur Courdimanche's for your luggage. To-night you will sleep under my roof, as in the old days—in the "House of the Poppy."'

'I was thinking of staying with Monsieur Courdimanche. But it was a kind thought of yours to have me with you, Augustine. So you still love your old master a little?'

'Why did my old master leave me?'

'Because he had other duties to fulfil, and because his pupil was a man.'

Augustine sighed.

'A man!—A child brought up on dreams; an alien among the men of his age and his country! What good am I in such an age as this? But you could not know. You were a scholar, a recluse. What did you hope to make of me?'

'A Christian.'

'Yes; a country gentleman of ancient France, a

Catholic of the old school, a good Latin scholar, a good gardener and sportsman, who would be quite willing to contract a marriage "in which love and inclination would have no part." But at the end of the nineteenth century, such a man is no better for all practical purposes than the hero of an old-fashioned romance. No one understood me, and when I went out into the world I could not breathe its air.'

'And I,' said Forgerus sadly, 'passed all my early life between the walls of a schoolroom or a library. Later on I made the acquaintance of your mother—that divinely pure soul continually haunted by regret for the cloister, and ever struggling against its prison of flesh. In this house and these gardens I was under the spell of the past. I believe the spirit of Port-Royal, pervading everything here, passed into me—and into you. And no doubt, in spite of my good intentions and my devotion, I was a bad master for you.'

'Don't blame yourself, since nobody blames you! Neither of us came into the world at the right moment. We were born three hundred years too late. I soon found out that I was a living anachronism—a plant in foreign soil. Just think of the strange fate of the last of the Chantepries: my father, a melancholy invalid, passed through life like a shadow; my mother, an invalid too, is possessed by her regret for the convent. And I—the son of their dreary nuptials—conceived in hatred of love, am unhappy in the world, and unhappy in solitude. I ask of religion the tangible sweetness of human affection, and of human affection the infinite bliss of

divine love. Of what use are men like ourselves? what are they doing in this century? Where is their place? In the cloister or the cemetery.'

'The cloister is open to you.'

'I don't feel that I am called to it by the divine voice; I haven't the soul of a Rancé. Come, my dear master, come and see your room.'

They went down the wide terrace path. The black elms rose up under the mournful sky, and the wind scattered a fresh, pungent, and yet delicate perfume—compounded of the thousand mingled aromas exhaled by Jacqueline's garden. Monsieur Forgerus remembered how he had walked down this path and breathed this same perfume for the first time, thirteen years before, in company with Jacqueline herself.

'She hated me even then—and now she is working against me. Oh! if I don't get Augustine away within two days, all is lost!'

Monsieur de Chanteprie took the tutor to the room which had remained shut up and untouched ever since his departure. It pleased Forgerus to see once more the little iron bedstead, the press, the table, and the china lamp with its blue shade.

'You must be tired,' said the young man; 'I will leave you.'

'No, indeed,' said Elias, taking him by the arm; 'I'm not going to let you go yet. Put the lamp on the table, and sit down here: we must have a talk. Just now, my dear boy, you said, or as good as said: "I have no refuge but the cemetery or the cloister." And I replied: "The cloister is open to you." But it seems you have not the soul of a Rancé. What

are you to do, then? I don't want to see you die, and I do want you to find your place in the world.'

'That will be a difficult matter.'

'Port-Royal would have suited you, with its comparative independence, its voluntarily accepted rule, its absence of irksome vows, its intellectual and manual labour——'

'Yes. I was reading yesterday with profound interest the story of Etienne de Chanteprie, that poet beloved of women, who asked as a favour that he might be made forest-keeper at Port-Royal, and who died in the odour of sanctity in the arms of Monsieur de Saci and Monsieur Le Maistre. Ah! how happy I should have been, had I walked like him over the countryside, worn a canvas garment, copied Monsieur Arnauld's manuscripts, or even occupied myself in the kitchen with Monsieur d'Eragny, "a gentleman from Le Vexin!" How many times have I in imagination enjoyed living the life of the Solitaries! But Port-Royal exists no longer.'

'If there were a Port-Royal in France, I should be there, Augustine, and I would receive you there with open arms. But don't you know that there exist even in our days, convents, refuges—hospitals for the cure of the spiritually sick, where holy and learned men receive, for a few weeks, sinners like ourselves? You know that, before leaving for Beyrouth, I had the great happiness of making a retreat in a Cistercian Abbey of the Limousin——'

'At La Trappe de St. Marcellin?'

'Exactly. The abbot has been a friend of mine

from childhood. I am going to ask his hospitality again now—for some length of time. Don Robert puts his library at my disposal. It is a delightful place.'

He described the monastery built in a valley, girdled as it were by the wall of vapour arising from its ponds; the quiet daily round of work on the farm; the convert brothers in brown robe and sabots, guiding the plough or reaping the crops; the fathers in their white cowls; the beauty of the evening services, the peaceful meditations, and the eternal silence.

'Yes; it would be a harbour of refuge, a veritable haven,' said Augustine.

'Only say the word, and I will take you there.'

'When?'

'To-morrow—the day after to-morrow, at the latest. Don Robert is expecting me.'

'To-morrow!'

'You must leave this place—free, with no earthly ties to bind you. I am taking you away, and isolating you in holy ground, with the sky as your only outlook.'

'To-morrow! But can I break the ties which hold me, can I free myself, by to-morrow? Impossible! Give me a little more time for reflection, for testing my strength, for paving the way for this rupture. I can't go away without seeing Fanny, and saying good-bye to her.'

'No, my dear boy,' said Forgerus, 'you must make a complete sacrifice, without any cowardly hesitation,—and that not in a week, not in three days, not to-morrow, but to-day. And you will do it, and do it out and out, I know. It is a sacrifice contrary to

nature ; it seems inhuman, because it is superhuman, and indeed no man could accomplish it in his own strength. The Apostle says : " I can do nothing of myself ; it is Christ which worketh in me." God will give you strength. God is helping you even now in secret, unknown to you. He has preserved you from the deadly effect of sinful habits by inspiring you with loathing for your iniquity : He has turned into dust and ashes those guilty pleasures which are the sweetest of all to carnal man ; He has harassed and tortured you, and watched over you unceasingly, so that even in your moments of most blissful earthly happiness you have felt the sting of His displeasure. Scarcely have you taken a single step towards repentance, when you are borne by His mercy to the throne of grace ; and the woman whom you think so near you, to whom you believe yourself so closely bound, is already far away from you. Truly I am confounded, I am lost in admiration, when I contemplate the Lord's work in you. But when I think of the condition which would result from a relapse into sin, I am seized with fear and sorrow. What a fall would that be ! What misery ! And I don't speak merely of the material troubles and worries to which you would be liable ; nor of the quarrels, jealousies, and misunderstandings which are the inevitable penalty of human love. I speak of the moral deterioration—the wretchedness of a soul deadened by sinful habits—listless, apathetic—incapable even of suffering. Cannot you realise this awful state of spiritual death, when God Himself is silent ?'

For a long while Monsieur Forgerus spoke, entreating and commanding by turns. Replying

to Augustine's questions, crushing his objections even before he had expressed them, he showed himself wonderfully clever at putting into words the secret aspirations of the poor tortured heart which had set up for itself an altogether impossible ideal. This aged man, whose sole acquaintance with the passions had been made through the medium of books, and who from his youth had voluntarily embraced the hardships of an ascetic life, described in fervid language the exalted condition of the chaste, the defilement wrought by woman, the subtle degradation of love. Augustine, worn out by the discussion, argued no longer. He yielded, in spite of himself, to the prospect of rest. To be at peace, alone, to see no more, to hear no more!

He murmured :

'If I agree to follow you, you will let me see her again, won't you? Just once! In your presence! I would not even touch her hand. I would simply explain things to her.'

The terrible anguish expressed by his hollow eyes and white lips touched Forgerus.

'Just once! I implore you, my dear master!'

'My poor boy, you grieve me inexpressibly. If only I could be sure. But no, no, it would be a dangerous act of folly. Spare yourself and her the risk of such a farewell! Why! you are weeping!'

'I am in torture. My heart is breaking; I think I must be going to die. Ah, Fanny, my dear treasure, my darling! I can see her sweet face, her dear eyes, her lips, convulsed by despair. Fanny, my Fanny! What will she do? where will she be in a month, in a year? In a year! She will have forgotten me, no

doubt, for, as you said yourself, she is not a woman of one love. She will despise me in order to forget me, or perhaps—She seeks happiness so eagerly! Ah! that she should be unhappy through me, tomorrow, and later on happy with another man—I cannot bear the thought! it tortures me beyond endurance!

‘I spoke hastily,’ said Monsieur Forgerus more gently. ‘You are tormented by jealous fears. Don’t turn away your head, don’t be ashamed of your tears. It is your last tribute to Nature’s weakness. I am sorry for you—oh, so sorry!’ But I was wrong in saying to you to-day: “You must give up your concern on this woman’s behalf.” If the friend for whom you weep is not altogether vile she will be more moved by your example than by your speech. God will perhaps grant, as the result of your repentance, the conversion which was refused to your prayers. The sacrifice of one of you may result in the salvation of both.’

Augustine raised his head: his eyes were full of unshed tears.

‘You know, my son, what is called the “mystic substitution,” and how the saints took on their own shoulders the temptations of the weak and the crimes of sinners. It is the highest and purest form of Christian charity. The innocent suffers voluntarily for the guilty, and the repentant for the unrepentant. Well! imperfect though you are, try to imitate this sublime unselfishness. Invest her whom you love with the humble merit of your repentance. Pray for her, suffer for her, satisfy that divine justice which she has outraged, be the living

ransom for her guilt. She seeks happiness: you will seek suffering; she wants to be loved and admired: you will be forsaken by all and despised; she delights in all the sights of this world, all the works of man's ingenuity and all the pleasures of the senses: you will only look at the world with eyes that see the invisible beneath things visible, you will have ears and voice for prayer only, you will mortify your flesh as an enemy to your spirit. Then—I venture to hope—the balance of sin and suffering will be equal in the sight of the Judge of all things. Grace will be given to the sinful woman who has neither asked nor deserved it, and to you, my son, as a result of superfluous merit.'

Monsieur de Chanteprie was yet undecided and distracted by emotion. Forgerus exhorted him again.

'Go to your room,' he concluded at last. 'Tomorrow we will go to mass together, and you shall tell me your decision. And pray to-night, pray earnestly! I can say no more. God will finish the work He has begun in you.'

XXVIII

TIMIDLY, like a poor wretch imploring alms, Fanny asked :

‘Has the five o’clock post come?’

‘Yes, madame. There’s nothing for you.’

‘Are you sure?’

The indignant *concièrge* replied :

‘Of course: didn’t I say so?’

Madame Manolé shut the house door whilst the woman sneered :

‘What manners! What’s she expecting? More love-affairs?’

Fanny went straight on along the Boulevard Raspail.

In the course of the last five days she had passed from surprise to anger, from anger to grief, and from grief to a kind of somnambulistic madness. The outside world no longer existed for her. She only received from it distant echoes, dim reflections, the consciousness of the days dying away with her hope and beginning over again with her sorrow. She only lived now to listen for the *concièrge’s* ring at the bell when she brought the letters, and the rustling of paper slipped under the door. She was neither hungry nor sleepy. Her imagination depicted to her in turn: Augustine ill and nursed by Madame de Chanteprie; Augustine by his dying

mother's side, a prey to remorse ; Augustine tired of love, ashamed of his folly, and paving the way for a 'silent, gentle rupture.' She had foreseen and feared everything, including the very worst and the impossible—excepting Forgerus' return and the drama enacted by Augustine's conscience—a drama whose climax the ex-tutor had precipitated.

For the hundredth time she repeated to herself the young man's last words: 'A whole life!' She walked beneath the stunted plane-trees of the boulevard, trying to lull her anguish, repeating over and over again the never-ending monologue which rose disjointedly to her lips:

'He loves me. I will not doubt him. He must be ill. But Jacquine would not leave me without news. No; it must be Madame de Chanteprie who is ill. Perhaps she is dying. If so, all will be changed. Augustine will be free and will belong to me alone! No—he would always feel that his mother was between us. He would say that we had killed her. Oh! to know! to know!'

She dug her nails into the palms of her hands. A short distance off an old man, sitting on a bench, was looking compassionately at the pretty, pale, dark woman talking to herself and uttering stifled exclamations. A journeyman painter stopped still with a bucket of paint in his hand.

'Who are you talking to, little lady?'

The chaffing words aroused Fanny. She found herself in front of the 'Lion de Belfort,' where the trams pass. The painter was laughing; the old man shook his head. 'People must think I'm mad,' thought Fanny. She quickly retraced her steps,

and reached the deserted pavement which bounds the Montparnasse cemetery. Shabby-looking children were playing here and there; their poorly clad mothers scolded them with shrill voices.

'Shall I go to Hautfort?' thought the poor, distracted woman. 'I might find Augustine at his mother's bedside! I might meet Madame de Chanteprie at her son's bedside! Good God! what shall I do? what shall I do? And yet perhaps I need not be so anxious: I may have a letter by the next post. But what if I don't?' She began to experience beforehand the pangs of disappointment. 'Well, if I don't, I'll go to Hautfort to-morrow. I'll wander round the house, and manage to meet Jacqueline.' Suddenly an idea occurred to her: 'Jacquine! No doubt she would reply if I wired to her. She is devoted to me. I should have a telegram by to-morrow morning. Why didn't I think of it before? Such a simple plan!'

Tranquillised to some extent, Fanny hastened to the nearest post-office. When she had despatched the telegram, she breathed again, her heart was lighter, she looked forward to the end of her torture. Still she dared not go home and wait for the post in her gloomy lodgings—especially sombre at nightfall. She resumed her aimless walk along the deserted paths which border the cemetery on its western side. The landscape of stone and brick stretched out interminably before her—a wilderness of buildings in parallel rows, with here and there a lighted shop, displaying mourning wreaths and bouquets of porcelain, and all the funeral paraphernalia indulged in by sorrowing friends. Behind the railings

marble slabs, monuments, crosses, plates engraved in Gothic characters, and Egyptian sarcophagi shone with a chalky whiteness. Gas jets flickered in the purple twilight. Over the railway-bridge the sky was clouded with a reddish mist. A factory siren was replying unceasingly to the whistles of the trains, like an imprisoned monster answering the call of monsters who were free.

And in this gloomy spot, at this gloomy hour, Fanny's soul yearned towards the aerial track of the smoke, and the monster with flaming eyes, roaring in the joy of departure. But, everywhere bounding the horizon the walls of stone shut her in, weighed her down, and overshadowed her. Enclosed by them, she felt as if she were at the bottom of a dark well, groaning, and gasping for breath—alone for ever.

'Ah! it's all over—all over!' she muttered.

She could not tell how or why, but she felt certain that all was over. Intuitively she knew that her doom was written. Those grey walls, the reddish sky, the scattered lights, the shrill sounds, would be for ever associated in her memory with her life's sorrow.

She entered a street by chance, and found life and movement again on the Boulevard Montparnasse. The restaurants frequented by the clerks and art-students of the Quarter overflowed to the middle of the pavement; and the little tables and the gay crowd reminded Fanny of the inns in the suburbs where she had sometimes sat with Augustine amid the Sunday diners-out. She could see her lover's look and gesture, and his fair hair, as he leaned towards her; and at the recollection her distress

was so acute that she groaned aloud, her face expressing utter misery, her limbs trembling, and her whole soul longing for death.

When she had nearly reached her house she was seized by panic; the fear of hearing the worst slackened her steps. Every now and then she raised her veil and wiped her eyes, heedless of the curiosity of passers-by. At the corner of the Rue Boissonade she hesitated; she dreaded the solitary meal, the silence, the cold, the sleeplessness!

'Where can I go? What can I do? Madame Robert is away. At the Saujons I should meet Barral. I have no one—no one.'

She plucked up courage, and entered the passage. The *concièrge* was watching for her.

'A letter for you, Madame Manolé!'

A letter which bore the Old Hautfort post-mark! But the childish, shaking hand was not Augustine's.

'MADAME,—I am writing to tell you that Monsieur Forgerus has come back from the Turks, and I don't like it, because of you. You must come, madame, at once.—Your obedient servant,

'JACQUINE FÉROU.'

'Ah! so the tutor has come back! Madame de Chanteprie had to call him to the rescue. They are all against me—the mother, the tutor, the priest, the Courdimanches, the pious, and the whole army of the Philistines. Never mind! They haven't got Augustine yet!'

Fanny, who had but a short time previously been driven to distraction by her presentiments, derived

energy and confidence from the presence of a tangible foe. The moment for tears and depression had passed: she had to act, to draw up a plan of campaign, to oppose stratagem to stratagem, force to force. Possibly Augustine had been touched by his mother's tears and his old tutor's precepts, perhaps he regretted his sin and the pledge he had given. 'They are getting at him; they are teaching him the dignified and contrite attitude he must assume towards me; they are whispering in his ear the phrases he must repeat to me. Already this good and excellent Monsieur Forgerus fancies he sees us renouncing each other, as in the fifth act of a tragedy—Titus and Berenice! Ah! poor Augustine! poor boy! tormented by them with their bogey God! But to-morrow I shall be at Hautfort, and I shall only have to say a word. Really it would be very stupid of me to be afraid. Afraid of whom, of what? Of that Forgerus? Haven't I the very best of reasons for being confident of success? I don't forget our last day at Rouvrenoir, Augustine's passionate oaths, his caresses, our farewell under the limes, and the tender, gentle way in which he said, "A whole life! It's a long lease, my love!" He promised me, he gave me his whole life. The idea of his sacrificing me, killing me, to satisfy a bigot and a foolish old woman! Such nonsense!'

She passed the night in thus reassuring herself, in spite of an occasional qualm which pricked her heart. As she was dressing the next morning, about ten o'clock, there was a ring at her bell. 'No doubt that's the telegram—Jacquine's reply to mine.'

She fastened her wrapper, knotted up her hair, and hastened to open the door. A spectacled old man, dressed in black, asked to see Madame Manolé.

‘I am Madame Manolé, monsieur.’

‘Madame, I hope you will excuse my intruding at such an early hour: I was afraid I might not find you at home later on. I am sent to you by Monsieur de Chanteprie.’

Fanny thought he must be the lawyer from Hautfort, whom she had only once seen in company with Madame Lassauguette.

‘That’s who it is,’ she thought. ‘He looks just like a lawyer. What is his business, I wonder? He’s not an attractive-looking man, with his short overcoat and his silver-rimmed spectacles.’

However, she controlled her feelings, and said pleasantly:

‘Come into the studio, monsieur, and please excuse its untidy condition: I am going a long journey, and my rooms are somewhat dismantled.’

The stranger sat down. He looked at the furniture, the works of art, and at Fanny herself, with interest.

Standing up, her white gown falling in heavy folds to her feet, she was fastening a pin in her unruly wealth of hair. Her face, which grief and weariness had refined in outline, and which was now as delicate as if carved in ivory, was smiling, and her glance was bent on her visitor in a charming expression of mingled curiosity, embarrassment, and shyness.

‘So,’ she said, with a faint blush, ‘Monsieur de Chanteprie has sent you?’

'Yes, madame. Allow me to introduce myself. You have heard my name. I am Monsieur Forgerus.'

Her smile fled, her upraised arms fell to her sides. Fanny repeated:

'Monsieur Forgerus!'

'Augustine's former tutor.'

'I know. What do you want with me?'

'Madame, I have come against my will, at Monsieur de Chanteprie's special request. My presence here may seem strange to you—for the world would say that we ought not to know each other—but——'

'I will put you at your ease, monsieur, and spare you the trouble of this preamble. Your name alone tells me the cause and the object of your visit. You are not sent by Monsieur de Chanteprie, but by Madame de Chanteprie.'

'Madame, you are mistaken: it was indeed Augustine who intrusted me with this delicate and painful mission.'

'I don't understand, monsieur, and I don't want to understand. If Monsieur de Chanteprie has anything to say to me, let him come here and say it himself. We know each other well enough to do without a go-between. You need not have troubled, monsieur.'

'I repeat, madame, I have come against my will, and the tone of your remark shows that you understand——'

She began to laugh—an angry, contemptuous laugh.

'I understand well enough! You have come, like the elder Duval in *La Dame aux Camélias*, to appeal to the guilty woman's noble heart! You have come

to ask me to give up Augustine de Chanteprie, my lover. On the way you have prepared speeches sentimental and speeches pathetic. For I'm not a wanton; you can't offer me money to go away: so you think you can pay me with fine words. Oh! it's all simple enough. I expected it. I understood at once. But—I am not a heroine; I have not a noble heart. And the man I love I'll keep.'

She uttered her reply all in one breath, scarcely knowing what she was saying. The moment she heard Monsieur Forgerus' name a cold fury possessed her, and she took up an attitude of contemptuous defiance.

Forgerus, on the other hand, was perfectly calm. He stroked his grey beard, and looked at Fanny as a spectator at the Zoological Gardens might look at a lioness pacing her cage and roaring the while. Just at first the young woman's pleasant welcome had moved him to some degree of pity for her. But this furious attack, this savage defiance, destroyed his last scruple.

'You are in a great hurry to say you will keep him! Supposing he wants to leave you?'

'He loves me!'

'He loves you—yes. But not now with that selfish, sensual passion which made him your slave for so long. His eyes are opened at last. He sees his sin and yours, his misery and yours, his interest and yours.'

'He loves me!'

'He sees his mother dying, with a curse for him on her lips, his friends alienated, and his soul lost for you and through you.'

‘He loves me! He loves me!’ cried Fanny in an agonised voice.

‘His love for you was part of his inmost soul, part of his very being. Tearing your image from his heart has almost killed him. The wound still bleeds, but I am administering a drastic remedy. Augustine will recover.’

‘He loves me! I have proofs—his letters—his wish that our lives should be united! Why do you interfere between us? Do you want to torture his poor mind with the vain and empty words you dinned into him for ten long years? Sin, salvation, eternity, God? Ah! you know how to make good use of your God! You are very smart, very clever! You took a child’s mind, moulded it to your own fancy, made him see vice in everything, and gave him low, vile ideas about woman and love! A fine achievement, indeed! You may well be proud of it! You turned a man into a monk, a visionary, a decrepit creature, incapable of living and loving. But I came on the scene—I!—and I destroyed your abominable work, for I became for him the arms which embrace, the lips which burn with ardour, the heart which loves and suffers. I was life, I was love! Oh! I have branded Augustine with a mark which you will never efface with your holy water and consecrated oil: I have entered into him, I dwell in his soul, in his body. Absent or present, I possess him. Oh! I’m not afraid of your tricks, your stratagems, your lies, your priests, your God! If Monsieur de Chanteprie were quite certain of his conversion, he would come and tell me of it himself. He is afraid of me! He loves me still!’

The warmth of her Italian blood, quick to murder or to love, all the southern violence hitherto held in check by education, spoke in Fanny's eyes and voice. She walked to and fro in the narrow space between the table and the sofa, panting, weeping, furious, desperate.

'I want to see him. You are deceiving me. You are playing a trick on me. Do I know anything of you? You are not Augustine's father or brother! I don't believe you. Give me proofs. Ah! I'll see Augustine. I insist upon it. I have the right——'

'You have no right,' said Forgerus, who could no longer control his anger. 'Only yesterday Monsieur de Chanteprie believed he owed you a duty—the duty of softening the blow for you. He sent me here to prepare you for it.'

'Many thanks! I'm much obliged to you!'

'I wished to make allowance for your anger, and to be patient with your sorrow, but I was not prepared for such a declaration of hatred—yes, hatred of God—as your words reveal. I should be foolish indeed, madame, to let Augustine see you again; I might just as well give him up to you, bound hand and foot. You suffer? That cannot be helped! It is only just. You have done too much harm to the Chantepries for me to be moved by your disappointment. You may insult me, if you like, you may utter blasphemies, you may weep. It makes no difference to me. You may as well make up your mind to it: you will never see Augustine again.'

She stopped in front of the old man, who gazed at her calmly through his spectacles.

'I shall never see him again? Take care what

you are doing! Do you think I shall let my lover be taken from me, and stay here quietly weeping? You had better not set me at defiance! I have nothing to lose—I'll do everything—everything—to see him again, to get him back. I am fighting for my life, I am defending my love.'

'Be quiet,' said Monsieur Forgerus. 'You want proofs. Here is one! a letter from Augustine. I promised to give it you when you had grown calm, after the distress caused by the first shock. But I have never, never seen a woman like you! I have had nearly enough of this scene, and of the hateful task which has been forced on me.'

He wondered at himself for being there, in that studio adorned with shameless figures, in company with a madwoman, a Gorgon, who said to his face things that made him shudder.

How could Augustine have loved this woman?

Whilst Monsieur Forgerus was pondering on the miseries of human love, Fanny went and sat down by the studio window. Her feverish fingers unfolded Augustine's letter with awkward haste, and turned over the pages. Her shaking hands were burning with her anguish—hot with the agony of her tortured heart. She read; and despair wrote itself on her face, dimmed her eyes, and bowed her head. With open hands, and forehead resting against the window, the tears streaming from her closed eyelids, she sat motionless, speechless, crushed.

Then Monsieur Forgerus rose, thoroughly embarrassed at his position, and anxious to withdraw. He said gently:

'I respect your grief, madame. My painful rôle

is at an end—and my presence can only annoy you.'

Fanny rose, with a frightened look :

'Oh no! don't go, monsieur—not yet.'

'But, madame——'

'I have so much to say to you—many things—my head is so confused, you know—things are all mixed up. I have had such a blow! Let me pull myself together—and try to understand—oh! monsieur, I entreat you, don't go away! I implore you!'

Where was the Fury, the Gorgon? She was but a poor woman—a poor, frightened, piteous child, on her knees to Forgerus.

'You'll listen to me, won't you? I said hateful things to you just now—I insulted you. But I was out of my mind, monsieur. In the last few days I have gone through so much! My head was in a whirl—monsieur, you are good, you are a Christian. Forgive me. I am sorry. Yes, I am very sorry now. Because I see everything depends on you. If you were to go, that would be the end of it all! And you hold my life in your hands—my life!'

'I assure you, madame, that I have no personal ill-feeling towards you. I am quite ready to listen to you.'

She went up to him, and in an altogether different voice, a voice which came from her very soul, she said :

'Let me see him again.'

'Impossible, madame. You have read what he says.'

'Once, just once! I will be strong, I won't give way. Just once, in your presence!'

‘She too!’ thought Forgerus. ‘The same prayer, the very same words!’ He could see Augustine in the bedroom at the summer-house, he could hear him saying: ‘To see her again, once more! Just once! In your presence!’ At the same moment of intense suffering, the same cry rose to the lips of both lovers. And Monsieur Forgerus was moved, in spite of himself. He saw himself as judge and executioner, holding at his mercy these two broken, suffering hearts, which yearned towards each other, and made a last supreme effort to meet and unite once more. But he did not question his right to separate them, he did not dream that he had committed a sort of crime against Nature by forcing Augustine’s conscience and substituting his own will for that of the young man. It did not even occur to him that Augustine and Fanny should dispose of their persons and their lives of their own accord, and free from all outside influence. Such a subversive and horrifying idea was far from his thoughts. His emotion was purely physical—a passing weakness of the nervous system, such as one might experience at the sight of a street accident, or at the operating table of a hospital.

‘Madame,’ he stammered, ‘you pain me exceedingly, for I am very sorry for your suffering, and I can do nothing at all to assuage it. My duty——’

Fanny wept no more; she fell on her knees. Her soul shone from her eyes, and transfigured her poor, grief-ravaged face, like the sublimely spiritual light which illumines the face of the dying. Dumbly she seized Forgerus’ hands: and in that moment her suppliant gesture, the wonderful eloquence of

her fixed look and half-opened mouth, acquired that more than human beauty which great artists have perceived and occasionally realised. Forgerus could not endure the sight. Choking with emotion, he tried to free his hands. For the first time in his life, he became a man in a woman's presence—melted, charmed, almost vanquished. But the words of consent died on his lips. He shook his head sadly, and repeated :

‘I cannot. Be brave!’

‘Then you can never have loved!’ she cried, with a sob.

‘I have never loved aught but God, His Church, and Augustine de Chanteprie. Augustine's interests alone guide my actions and regulate my feelings. Even pity must yield to what is best for him. Rise, madame! Do not kneel before a man, a sinner like yourself. We must kneel to God alone.’

He forced her to rise, led her to the sofa, and sat by her side. She obeyed mechanically, and looked at him with the eyes of an animal which is being tortured, and cannot understand why. This frail old man, who spoke so authoritatively and calmly, seemed to her powerful as a god, and master of her fate. Her sole idea was to gain time—to keep him, and perhaps to bend him to her wish. At a word from him she would have kissed his feet.

‘You are intelligent, and your heart is not altogether perverted. Rise above vulgar resentment. Bless the hand which bruises you for your own good. Show yourself worthy, in fact, of the love which Augustine still bears you. The trial will be good for you, and if you humbly endure the sorrow

you have deserved, you will thereby draw nearer to God. Try to pray.'

'Pray?' she said. 'Why? The sorrow I have deserved? I don't understand. What evil have I done? For what crime am I being punished? I loved Augustine; he loved me. Were we not free? Did I seek Monsieur de Chanteprie's fortune, or his name? I wanted nothing from him but himself. I endured everything from him. I accepted everything. He sent me to Father Le Tourneur; he might have sent me to a Protestant parson, or a Jewish rabbi. I would have gone just the same, and quite as willingly. I did my best to believe. I could not succeed. Was it my fault? If that is all you have to reproach me with, you are very unjust—all of you. Ah! how simple it would be just to live and love, and be happy, without thinking of the other world! If there is a God, what can it matter to Him if Augustine de Chanteprie and I love each other?'

'O Lord! pardon this woman!' thought Elias Forgerus. 'She knows not what she says!'

Fanny continued:

'They told you I was a monster, didn't they? It's Madame de Chanteprie, and bigots like her, who are monsters. They have no heart, they have no blood in their veins. Oh! how I hate such people! I! I! a criminal! just because I wanted to live my full woman's life, just because I sought happiness!'

'You sought it where it did not exist.'

'Does it exist in your convents, then, your churches, your frigid heaven, which is as nothing to me?'

'Poor woman!'

'You pity me?'

'I do, indeed. The light shone on you, and you would not see it.'

'You pity me. And he—does he pity me too with his fanatic heart, does he pity me while he treats me thus?'

'He is more sorry for you than for himself. How he would suffer if he heard you speak like this!'

'Does he expect me to say "thank you," when he deserts me, when he kills me? For he has killed me! I shall never, never again, be the proud, self-reliant woman I was! The source of my strength is gone. I can struggle no longer. I'll let myself go, no matter where or how, just as life may lead me.'

'Don't say that. You will do as Augustine wishes. His painful sacrifice will not be wasted on you. Madame, will you not be moved by the supreme prayer of a man who loved you so much as to imperil his own soul to save yours? Will you not follow him in the narrow path of repentance, and join him again in that blissful realm where we meet and are united for eternity?'

'Words! words!' she said, and suddenly gave way to tears again. 'I am lost. What is to become of me now? All is dark around me. It is night—the desert. I have no one. What shall I do to-night, to-morrow, and afterwards? And I am young. I have long years to live—alone—always alone—I who have only lived in loving!'

'God pardons sinners, and consoles the afflicted. Give yourself to Him, madame.'

She did not answer.

‘I hope He will enlighten you, but I very much fear—Come, I must leave you! Meditate, pray. We shall pray for you. And now good-bye, madame.’

‘Good-bye.’

In the cold light and the silence of the studio, the figures in the pictures make their motionless gestures; the plaster goddesses look with their pupil-less eyes at the woman extended on the sofa. Alone, among these inanimate beings, Fanny suffers, as she will suffer—alone—amid the living and indifferent world of men.

She feels neither hatred nor anger; she does not rouse herself to curse Elias Forgerus and Madame de Chanteprie; she forgets that Barral foretold what has come to pass, and is waiting for her.

Like clouds before the wind, her thoughts pass on. They are but a chaos of memories. Two years of her life—that pure first love amid the enchanted scenery of Chêne-Pourpre—the valley of Port-Royal—the summer evenings—the bright moon between the lime-trees—the road bathed in white light—the House of the Poppy! Ah! the play of the firelight on the bed, Adhémar’s smile, that elusive heart quelled at last, the young lover trembling in her arms, quivering and throbbing with emotion! That hair, those lips, those eyes, whose ardour devoured her!—those eyes, the memory of whose burning glance is like a living, red-hot arrow thrust into the quick of her wounded heart! Everything, the letters that she read with tears, the leave-takings, and the welcomes, the talks, the caresses, the anxious

waitings, the jealousies, the joys, the sorrows, the mysterious intimacy—all is now—the Past!

What matter the months and the years! Her lost lover is as far from Fanny as the dead for whom she no longer mourns! The adored face will gradually grow dim, and fade from her memory. She will forget the savour of Augustine's lips, the sound of his step, his very gestures, his laugh, his clasp, and even the tone of his voice as he said 'Fanny!'

He is no more! He is dead to her! Fanny calls him in vain. She stretches her convulsive hands to him. She cries: 'No! it's not true! it's impossible! It shall not be!' Her whole being is steeped in sorrow, her very life seems to be ebbing away with her tears. Crushed and silent now, she stirs no more. She makes no sound. Her eyes grow dim, and she is conscious only of a profound longing for death.

XXIX

ONE Sunday in September Monsieur de Chanteprie appeared at high mass, and the news of his return, carried from house to house, and shop to shop, soon reached Old Hautfort.

The Abbé Le Tourneur vaunted his triumph before the members of those pious families who had been the witnesses of his discomfiture. He praised God, who had chosen him as the unworthy instrument of His work of salvation: for he alone—Father Le Tourneur, good, worthy, wise priest that he was—he alone had advised Madame de Chanteprie, helped Monsieur Forgerus with his sage counsel, and restrained Monsieur Courdimanche, whose ill-advised zeal might have ruined everything. And, driven to severity by a personal resentment which was excusable enough, the Abbé Le Tourneur showed himself more of a Jansenist than all the Chantepries put together. Indeed, this indulgent priest, who prided himself on being an 'opportunist'—the gentle Father Le Tourneur who was always so clever in leading a tender feminine conscience in the way it should go, now deplored aloud the laxity of Christian discipline which makes public penance no longer obligatory after the scandal of public sin. And the ladies shuddered at the thought of seeing Monsieur de Chanteprie clothed in sackcloth, with

a rope round his neck and ashes on his head, kneeling at the gates of St. John's, and confessing his sin before the assembly of the faithful.

Augustine tried not to notice the curious looks which were directed towards him, and the tactless or spiteful speeches to which he was forced to listen. By a supreme effort of humility he did violence to his innate modesty, and underwent the petty torture involved in an exhibition of himself at high mass—a torture imposed on him by the Abbé Le Tourneur as a poor enough substitute for public confession. From that day forth he remained shut up in his house, and when by chance he passed through the streets of Hautfort he spoke to no one.

'Well, so your master hasn't come to see you?' said the gossips to Jacqueline Férou. 'There's a new housekeeper and a cook at the Chantepries. Your place is taken.'

The Chavoche smiled contemptuously as if to say: 'They won't replace me!' She lived alone in the cottage she had taken near St. John's Church, execrated by her neighbours, cultivating a little garden, and tending two favourite cats. In the afternoon she would sit in her courtyard, while the ragamuffins of the place peered in at the half-open door, to see the terrible Chavoche shaking her head and talking to herself as she knitted.

One day, as Jacqueline was dreaming thus, and warming herself in the autumn sunshine, Monsieur de Chanteprie entered the courtyard.

'Augustine! My boy!'

She took him in her arms, kissed him twice passionately on the cheek, and then, without letting

him go, drew back to get a better look at him, and gazed at him fondly.

'It is he!—himself! They said he wouldn't come here; but I knew well enough that he couldn't have forgotten his old nurse.'

When she had somewhat calmed down, she made her 'boy' sit beside her, and, still holding his hands, said:

'I suppose you're not going to be a priest, then, as you've come back to Hautfort?'

'No, Jacquine, I have no vocation for that. Who put such an idea into your head?'

'Oh, they say lots of things in this place! You've made people talk, you know. And a queer set of people they are too! Such stories as they tell!'

'They don't trouble me, I can assure you. Let's talk about yourself, nurse. Are you well? Are you finding things very dull here?'

'I've three hundred francs a year; the cottage isn't bad, and the cats keep me company. All the same, when Madame Angélique gave me notice, I was utterly surprised, I can tell you! After living with the family for fifty years! for I shall soon be seventy-nine, though you mightn't think it, my boy! Is Madame Angélique pretty well?'

'She keeps up wonderfully.'

'Yes; she'll bury us all. People who don't love don't get used up. And you're quite good friends with her now?'

'My mother is very good to me—too good.'

'Better late than never. And what about Monsieur Forgerus?'

'He's gone back to Asia Minor.'

'You know that Father Vitalis has left Rouvrenoir?'

'Yes.'

'They made things hot for him. They wrote false, scandalous things about him to his bishop, to get rid of him. And now the poor man's sent to the other end of the diocese. Rouvrenoir hasn't another curate. They won't send one, because the people are all too irreligious. There's no work for a curate. The priest from Fréville says mass and buries the dead. And there's a girls' school now at the presbytery.'

Augustine looked at the little courtyard, the tiny garden yellow with dahlias and coreopsis, and—on the other side of the wall—he could see the church portico, the gargoyles with their blunted angles, worn away by time, and the buttresses—all so beautiful in the evening light.

'How strange you look, my boy.'

'Do you think me changed?'

'You've not got so very thin, nor so very pale either—and yet you are changed.'

'Oh! well, I'm glad to have seen you.'

He rose.

'Don't go. I've something to tell you.'

'What?'

Jacquine had gone into the house. She reappeared, carrying a little parcel tied with grey string.

'My dear boy, these are papers for you.'

'Papers?'

'Yes; letters. I promised——'

He made a gesture of refusal.

'Well, what? Taking them doesn't bind you to anything. You're not obliged to reply. Just read them.'

'Madame Manolé exists no longer for me.'

'And what if she were really dead?'

Augustine, who was walking to the door, stopped short, and turned very pale.

'Dead?'

'No; she's not dead—but she might just as well be, poor thing.'

'Has she been here?'

'Yes, indeed, ever so many times! She longed to die. She used to say: "I can't stand it any longer, Jacquine, I suffer too much!"—and similar things, so that my heart bled when I listened to her. I told her to have more sense, and that it would be very silly at her age and with her face, to sacrifice herself because of a man—and that you were not the only man in the world.'

'Ah! is that what you told her?'

'I was very angry with you and your mother and your old master—and I was so sorry for the poor girl. Here are all the letters she wrote you. I kept them to give to you, because no one knew your address.'

'I shall not read them.'

'Well, then, you can burn them. As for me, I'm glad to get rid of them, and may the foul fiend fly away with me if I ever interfere in your affairs again! But my own idea is that you will be the first to speak to me about your Fanny.'

'You are not to say such things.'

'Have you no heart, then?'

‘You cannot understand me.’

‘Well, well, don’t be angry! We won’t speak of her again. What’s done is done.’

Augustine put the packet of letters in his pocket, and thoughtfully wended his way homewards.

During his first weeks at St. Marcellin he had suffered horribly. He was tortured day and night by his absolute ignorance of Fanny’s condition and the state of her feelings; by the certainty that he was misunderstood—perhaps forgotten; by his lover’s anxiety and jealousy; and by a thousand sad and gloomy thoughts. God, who had at first seemed to welcome him, suddenly withdrew from him; the spring of his fervent outpourings dried up in the heart of the penitent; prayer was no longer aught but mechanical recitation. Heartsick, steeped in bitterness, and deprived of that sense of grace which he began to despair of ever meriting, Augustine lost hope. He thought eternal damnation was to be his fate, and believed the first shades of the everlasting night were already descending on him. But Monsieur Forgerus was on the watch. He knew—better than the confessor whom Augustine had chosen—how to overcome his pupil’s doubts in the course of their daily prayers and conversations. He boldly read a religious meaning into all the strange circumstances and coincidences of his past life and unlucky love-affair; he pointed out to him in everything the manifest work of God, ever ready to detach from the world him whom He did not destine for the world’s embrace—God hidden, God present, God choosing the most unlikely and the most diverse means to effect His purpose, and pro-

ducing in His own good time that disturbance of mind and heart which paves the way for a striking manifestation of divine grace.

Augustine humbled himself without fervour, and prayed without joy, but he went on humbling himself and praying; and by degrees, under the influence of what Fanny called 'the auto-suggestion of mystics,' his senses were deadened, his heart was softened, and tears came to his relief.

When his long retreat was over, Monsieur Forgerus left for Beyrouth, and Monsieur de Chanteprie left the cloister as he would a hospital. He returned to Hautfort, his mind still in a state of turmoil, and bewildered by the return to everyday life. Church services, prayers, pious readings, and manual labour left no room for brooding in a life which Augustine did his best to make harsh and self-denying, and every moment of which he scrupulously regulated. Even his sorrow, which was now a dull ache pierced by occasional acute qualms of grief, became an old and cherished habit of mind, which Augustine could not hope to cure just yet. The remembrance of his mistress was to his heart what the haircloth was to his body.

And now his visit to Jacqueline had disturbed that sort of passive endurance, that mental slumber which he fondly thought to be the peace of God. The mere name of Fanny, and the touch of the papers which she had handled, had sufficed to rekindle all the old fever of his senses and imagination. Shut up in the new room which he now occupied, Augustine asked himself with anguish whether he would have the cruel courage to send Fanny's

letters back to her, without either reading or burning them.

‘If I keep them, I shall read them sooner or later, in a moment of weakness ; and if I read them, I am lost.’

For a moment he weighed the packet in his open hand. There must be twenty or thirty letters, he thought—bits of Fanny’s life—of that unknown life he had so desired to know. By reading them he could quench his passionate curiosity, and perhaps set his fears at rest. How light was their weight ! And yet, these little sheets of paper held a whole world of love and suffering—a pent-up soul, whose quivering he could almost feel. Dear Fanny ! Augustine could see her going to Jacquine and asking : ‘ Has he come back ? ’ She had not consoled herself ; she had not forgotten—his darling !

The young man pondered thus for a long while ; then he placed the packet of letters in the empty hearth between the fire-dogs, and surrounded them with twigs of wood. But his heart failed him. He remained undecided, resting on one knee, with a match in his hand.

‘ I cannot. It is as if I were going to destroy a part of herself.’

He rose and paced the room. It was a corner room, situated on the first floor of the large house, and formerly called ‘ the guest-room.’ Its only window overlooked the plain. It boasted neither luxury nor comfort. The bedstead was of walnut with serge curtains, the blinds of mended muslin, the furniture common and of different patterns ; on the wall was that Jansenist Christ which the lovers had banished from their room, and which Madame

Angélique had had brought over from the summer-house study.

Augustine knelt before this Christ carved in wood that was almost black with age, the head bristling with thorns, the sides projecting and angular owing to the extension of the arms. He prayed for a few minutes, and then returned to the fireplace. The flame shot up and licked the edges of the packet, which quickly turned black, fringed by a glowing line; the fire, burning up more brightly, at last enveloped it; and of Fanny's love-letters there remained nothing but a little heap of white ash, and innumerable black, feathery fragments blown about in the current of air from the chimney. Monsieur de Chanteprie had kept the promise he had made to his spiritual director—he had overcome temptation; and yet—was it the holy joy of obedience which suddenly imparted a strange sweetness to his sorrow? Whence came the emotion to which he could not give a name, which was, in fact, almost one of joy?

He dared to rejoice, and why? Because his mistress loved him still—and with what a love! Were these the sentiments of a penitent? If Fanny Manolé, touched by divine grace, were to enter the narrow path of repentance, then, and then only, would Augustine de Chanteprie have any right to experience feelings of joy respecting her. But such a fact could never reach his ears, save by the merest chance.

‘She is dead to me!’ he said. ‘We know not the condition of the dead, and yet we pray for them. Therefore I will pray for her.’

And Fanny again entered into his life.

But she was not, as he had feared, the Temptress. He was still under the influence of the ideas and sentiments he had brought back with him from St. Marcellin, and the mist which rose from the ponds encircling the Cistercian Abbey seemed to pervade, as it were, his mind and senses. Fanny did not penetrate beyond this mystic cloud. Veiled and inaccessible, she became once more a soul, and Augustine, in praying for her, experienced all his old sensations, which now resembled melodies transposed from a major to a minor key.

His life became but a prayer and an offering. Every morning, asking on behalf of the absent one that free gift, that undeserved aid—grace—he said: ‘May she live without sin this day!’ Every evening, offering up to his Judge the daily tribute of self-imposed privation and quenched desires, he said: ‘Regard not, I pray Thee, the iniquity of this woman!’

Towards the middle of December a letter from Fanny arrived, addressed directly to Monsieur de Chanteprie; then, a fortnight after, another, and so on every fortnight, at almost regular intervals. Fanny had seen Jacqueline again; she knew that Augustine was at Hautfort.

Monsieur de Chanteprie trembled when he received these letters; he looked at the handwriting as he would have looked at a portrait, and, from the shape of the lines and curves, he deduced childish inferences as to Fanny’s physical and moral condition. These letters, which he did not read, told him various things: that Fanny loved him still; that she was in Paris, at the house he knew, since all the envelopes

bore the Boulevard Montparnasse postmark. Once the postmark showed her to be travelling in the South, and the young man's imagination worked. These expected letters brought a human interest into his ascetic life—an interest excusable enough, since Augustine had done nothing to provoke or maintain the correspondence. How he would have loved to keep them, just to look at them sometimes, without opening them, to touch them, to kiss them furtively! But he had sworn. With averted head he threw the grey envelopes into the flames, and began to count the days again.

He had not returned to Chêne-Pourpre; he never went near the summer-house, whose slate roof looked violet between the bare branches of the trees. All the time he did not give to works of charity and labour in the garden, he spent in his room, and devoted to revising the Memoirs of his family. After his death, perhaps, this history of the Chantepries, if published, might serve for the instruction of the pious. And these were his hours of spiritual recreation, the time when his soul escaped into that dear past, and dwelt amid the people and the things whose true contemporary he was.

The long and gloomy winter passed on, each day bringing the same duties, the same tasks, the same thoughts. Towards the end of March, Augustine was surprised by recurring attacks of physical lassitude. Work became more difficult to him, his temples throbbed with headache. An unaccountable feeling of depression worried him, he felt as if expecting some one or something.

His nerves throbbing, and more oppressed than was his wont, he sat down one day on a bench on the terrace. A heavy shower was falling from the blue and grey sky. Mists rolled over the tan-coloured trees, and the air, impregnated with moisture, was like a large, still, tepid bath, enervating to a degree.

Augustine breathed with difficulty. He had a pain at his heart, which ached as if it would burst. He thought of Fanny, and seemed to feel her light touch on his inflamed eyelids and aching brow.

'What is wrong with me?' he sighed. 'I'm not myself. And yet there's nothing new in my life.'

His eyes, fixed on the ground, discovered among the dead leaves, at the foot of a lime-tree, a pale violet. On the sombre branches of the trees, downy or glutinous buds were bursting forth, and Monsieur de Chanteprie realised that spring had come.

XXX

SINCE Jacquine's departure Madame Angélique had ordered the household herself. She was no longer satisfied with giving to the poor the superfluity of her possessions: even necessities were cut off in order to increase 'God's share.' Mademoiselle Desfossés, the new housekeeper, an exceedingly ugly old woman, became the administrator of those secret charities which Jacquine would never have tolerated. The outward appearance of comfort, which Jacquine had maintained by sheer industry, gradually disappeared. The horse and carriage were sold. Monsieur de Chanteprie replaced the labourer who had formerly worked in the garden. And as Mademoiselle Desfossés' virtues were of the pious rather than the domestic order, the plates and dishes became chipped, the curtains hung unmended over the dirty window-panes; spiders spun their webs in the angles of the ceilings; extreme charitableness produced the same effect as extreme avarice. The ill-kept condition of the house, the indifference of its mistress, and the housekeeper's carelessness, pained Cariste Courdimanche. When she made guarded remarks on the subject to Madame Angélique, the latter replied that she and her son were poor in the sight of God, and ought not to fare more delicately and sumptuously than the poor.

The old chest in the large drawing-room disappeared, then the hangings in the dining-room, most of the pictures, and an antique clock in blue enamel and alabaster. The Abbé Le Tourneur was astonished.

‘Are you selling your antiquities?’ said he to Madame de Chanteprie. ‘I know a dealer in Paris who is on the look-out for Louis Seize furniture. Haven’t you a room in the summer-house furnished throughout with perfect and well-preserved specimens of that style?’

‘The Poppy room, with grey and yellow furniture? Are those old things very valuable?’

‘It seems so. Would you like me to tell the dealer? He would perhaps give a good price for the “old things,” as you call them.’

‘Let him come to Hautfort. Augustine shall show them to him.’

‘But,’ said the priest, ‘Augustine won’t like parting with the family heirlooms, perhaps.’

Madame Angélique knew quite well what he was thinking. She replied grimly :

‘Augustine will obey me. Indeed, I would gladly give away all those things, with their ungodly associations!’

That same evening she made known her wishes to the young man, who remonstrated feebly but in vain, and two days later the Parisian dealer, Monsieur Guibert, called on Monsieur de Chanteprie.

He was a mild, white-haired old man, who affected the airs of an artist, and wore a flat-brimmed silk hat. The academic violet bloomed in his buttonhole.

He noticed the bare condition of the drawing-

room, Augustine's clothes of threadbare, dull brown velvet, shabby and soiled, and he suspected hidden poverty, inexperienced clients, and a good stroke of business awaiting him.

Monsieur de Chanteprie took him to the summer-house. The blinds on the first floor had not been drawn for a year, but on the ground floor the gold-lined inside shutters could be seen through the window-panes. The roof, wet from recent rain, was shining in the sun; the doorstep was covered with dead leaves and grass. Bright drops were falling from the arborescent ivy.

The key grated in the rusty lock. Augustine could not open the door.

'Does no one live in this charming spot?' asked Monsieur Guibert.

'No one.'

The door gave way. A whiff of cold air, a blast as from a tomb, met Augustine. The hall stood revealed with its mosaic floor, its carved woodwork, and its poppy-crowned Cupids waving aloft the emblems of gardening.

'Let us go upstairs, monsieur. I will precede you.'

The dealer stopped to examine the sculptures in detail.

Monsieur de Chanteprie repeated:

'Nothing here is for sale. Come upstairs. Don't stop there.'

His nervous movements and the impatient rudeness of his words took Monsieur Guibert by surprise. This Monsieur de Chanteprie must, he thought, be a noble pauper, who was ashamed to have to admit

his beggared condition by selling his family relics second-hand.

‘Excuse me! there are mirrors and carvings here—a good deal damaged, it is true—which I might perhaps buy, if you—’

Augustine was already on the stairs. Monsieur Guibert thought:

‘What a strange young man!’

In the study the Empire desk drew his attention first of all.

‘Allow me!’ said he. ‘We will look at the Louis Seize things in a moment.’

His looks, as well as his fingers, caressed the dark, satin-smooth mahogany, the bronze fittings, and the lowered lid of the exquisite piece of furniture.

‘And now will you show me the bedroom?’

‘You—you insist upon it?’ said Augustine.

‘Why, I came to see it!’ cried Monsieur Guibert, who began to think his client a little *too* original. ‘If I am inconveniencing you, or if you don’t want to come to terms with me, I will go. Perhaps you are not well?’ he added.

‘Not very—it’s nothing much.’

‘Ah! the first warmth of April is unhealthy. You should take care of yourself. Go in front, monsieur; you know the landmarks, but I can’t see a bit. It’s like the Sleeping Beauty’s room.’

A thread of daylight parted the shutters. Augustine’s eyes, blinded at first by the darkness, gradually grew accustomed to it and recognised the shapes and colours of the articles in the room, all covered as they were by a mantle of dust. Between the little columns of the clock the scarabæus of the

pendulum hung motionless, its wings of gold touched with a faint relief of light. The mirror was but a distant green reflection—like a dead and stagnant pool of water. Two armchairs, close to each other, seemed to have been pushed apart by the sudden flight of their occupants.

Trembling like a violator of tombs, Augustine threw back the shutters: broad daylight flooded the room.

‘Carved wood—silk hangings of the period. It would all have to be mended. Look at the worm-holes—and the stuff is very much the worse for wear.’

Guibert came and went, moved the chairs on which Rosalba and Fanny had sat in turn, handled the clock which had struck the sleepless hours of their nights of love, felt the curtains of the bed, and shook the dust from their folds. And Monsieur de Chanteprie, who could scarcely restrain his impulse to send the man away, hung his head, and looked at the ashes in the grate.

‘We have great difficulty in selling. There are so many imitations; there’s so much modern antique. And, besides, the fashion just now is for modern style. Well, I’ll go to sixteen hundred francs.’

Augustine spoke as in a dream:

‘We can both consider the matter. I will write to you.’

‘But——’

‘I will write to you—to-morrow. Excuse me. I am not very well. I am not equal to talking just now.’

‘Very well,’ said Monsieur Guibert, amazed.

‘Please excuse me. If I had only known. Then you’ll write to me?’

‘To-morrow.’

Augustine accompanied the dealer to the little gate into the grounds, and then returned to the desecrated room. He was choking with shame and anger, in face of the articles which the stranger’s contact and desire had contaminated; he felt he would like to kiss them one by one, and ask their forgiveness.

For the first time he shook off his passivity, his habitual inertia. What did his mother and the Abbé Le Tourneur want? They wanted money for the poor. Well, Augustine would sell his lands, his farms, his books, even the blankets off his bed. He would eat out of a porringer, and drink out of a wooden goblet like the hermits of legend, for he had no need of money and comfort. What labourer, what peasant, fared more poorly than he? But to see the relics of his childhood and youth pass into alien hands! No, it was more than a sacrifice; it was sacrilege!

‘Strangers would sit in these armchairs, use the bed for slumber or debauchery. Lovers might——’

He raised the curtain of saffron-coloured silk, looked at the low couch, and the counterpane with its mauve-coloured designs representing the hermitage of Ermenonville and the tomb of Jean-Jacques. As a child he had amused himself with looking at the composite landscapes, the willows and the sarcophagi, which—repeated at regular intervals—formed the pattern of the Jouy cloth. Later on, on an October evening, he had seen the old stuff take

on a purple tinge in the dancing reflections from the fire. Outside the storm had scattered the leaves of the aspens; the rain had pattered down: the words murmured lip to lip had been but sighs in the enchanted silence of the room.

'No,' thought Augustine; 'our love was not merely the call of flesh to flesh, or lust in sentimental guise. If ever I did abandon myself to the suggestions of instinct, if I did give way to voluptuous desire, it was not that night. I ought, indeed I wish, to expiate that hour; but I cannot regret it.

'There—she was there—standing at the head of the bed. She was neither wayward nor provoking, but so simple, so sincere, so happy in giving herself! How can I ever forget the infinite tenderness of her eyes—her beautiful eyes which loved me, which seemed to pity me, and to ask pardon for the happiness they promised? Ah! those eyes—those dear eyes! They are ever before me; I feel their tearful glance ever fixed on me, questioning me, and understanding not!

'Oh! Fanny, my Fanny, will you ever understand? Will you guess, through your heart's intuition, the secret of my silence? Can you possibly love me still? Will you not cease to write to me, as one forgets to put flowers on a grave when the time of mourning is past?'

Stretched on the bed, his face on the pillow, he pressed the counterpane in his hands and to his lips.

'Fanny, where are you, what are you doing, while I embrace your phantom on this chill bed? Listen

me, my own love! What sweet words you would utter in my ear! How you would hush my sorrow on your bosom! I suffer, Fanny, I suffer at being alone and loved no longer. God is so high, so distant! I want human love. I want to become a little child again in a woman's arms.'

The curtains, gently fallen back into place, spread their silky wall once more around the bed, their worn texture admitting here and there a faint glimmer of daylight. An inarticulate plaint died away in their folds, a name was uttered over and over again by stammering lips. The enchantment of love had once again taken possession of Augustine.

When Madame de Chanteprie questioned him, he answered :

'Monsieur Guibert is going to write to me.'

In truth, he had forgotten that it was he who had promised to write. Nothing more was heard of the dealer.

But Augustine was as if bewitched. The damp and mild April weather made him feverish. The walls of his room stifled him.

He resumed his old habit of taking long walks : he was to be seen at Chêne-Pourpre and Rouvrenoir, and in front of the 'Three Limes.' The decayed leaves, collected under the trees since the previous autumn, exhaled a churchyard odour around the little house. On the door a notice was affixed, like an epitaph. Augustine read : 'For Sale.' A sharp pang shot through him. He fled from the spot.

He returned. He wandered under the chestnuts and oaks, near the presbytery of Rouvrenoir and in

the forest. He dragged his emaciated frame, memory-haunted soul, everywhere ; and invariable sort of charm, an invincible attraction, drew him to the House of the Poppy.

For the Well-Beloved awaited him, in the room with the pearl-coloured woodwork and the delicately tinted hangings—awaited his coming, which was the prelude to a strange and marvellous intimacy. She was not the mistress, impatient for sensual enjoyment ; she was the consoling friend ; hers was the ‘humble love’ for which Augustine’s heart had during the yearned. When he tried to read or write, when he was working in the garden, an inner voice said ‘Go!’ He stiffened his back against the temptation ; he said : ‘I will not go!’ But in spite of his resolutions steps led him to ‘Julia’s Grove’ ; still he said ‘I will not go in ; I will not go upstairs!’ But when he entered, he went upstairs ; he sat by the fire in the rocking-chair—and Fanny, evoked at his call, held out her arms to him.

During these sweet and troubled days Monsieur de Chanteprie had no thought but for the letter which was to come. Even if he had the courage to refrain from reading it, he certainly would not have had the courage to burn it this time. How he regretted now having destroyed the others ! The days passed on ; but for the first time since the autumn, Augustine was doomed to disappointment ; Fanny’s letter did not come. It never came.

Then Monsieur de Chanteprie experienced the torture born of long waiting in vain which he had often inflicted on Fanny herself. He invented all kinds of hypotheses rather than face the truth.

Fanny was ill; she was travelling perhaps. Why did she write no more? He dared not say: 'Why should she write still?' And yet, after a year passed in vain and bitter hope, it stood to reason that the unhappy woman must be tired of supplicating a deaf and dumb fate. Custom would deaden her pain. She was resigned at last. She would soon console herself.

The days passed by. The hot months succeeded to those of early spring. One summer evening Augustine went to see Jacquine.

No sooner had he begun to speak than she interrupted him:

'My poor boy, I knew well enough that you would be coming back to talk to me about her, but I've nothing to tell you—or very little!'

'Tell me what you know.'

'Why?' said the old woman hesitatingly. 'You've got on all right for months without knowing anything; don't think about Madame Fanny any more, my boy. It's not worth while——'

'So she has consoled herself, has she, with the other man? It was only to be expected, sooner or later. I had no more claim on her life. Oh! I bear her no ill-will—but—all the same——'

His voice broke. He bit his white lip, and his chest was heaving.

'My boy!' said Jacquine, alarmed, 'is it possible that the news can affect you like this?'

'Tell me everything—quickly—I implore you.'

'Alas! "Everything" is not much, my boy. Madame Fanny came very often last winter. But

you never replied to her letters. So she thought you no longer loved any one but God. My word! it was pretty mortifying for a woman to be hanging about after you——'

'Well, what next?'

'Next, she came again in the middle of April, but this time she was so changed, so sad! She went to have another look at your house, the "Three Limes," at Rouvrenoir, and I prepared dinner for her here, at this table. She wept much. She said: "Jacquine, I ought to have died at once, when he left me, but I went on hoping and waiting. And now it's too late: I am a coward. I have given up——" And she said, too: "What has he done with me, Jacquine? What has he driven me to? I am lost now—lost! If you see him again, just tell him that things have come about as he wished——" She cried and sobbed till evening, and then she went. Will she come back? I don't know.'

'No; she will not come back,' said Augustine. 'Good-bye, Jacquine.'

Jacquine sprang forward, clutched at the young man's coat, and pulled him back by main force.

'Listen!' she said.

'What?'

'You get such ideas into your head! What do words said in grief and anger signify? We don't know anything——'

'Yes; I know——'

'Since you're so upset by all this, you must love Madame Manolé still!'

He pushed Jacquine away, without replying.

'You love her!' cried the Chavoche, 'you love her!'

Great God! what a misfortune! You might so easily have been happy! And now, here you are, separated from each other by goodness only knows how many miles. Oh, my boy, say one word, and I swear to you I'll go and find your Fanny, and give her back to you!

She hung on to Augustine, fascinating him with her yellow eyes, but he gently pushed her aside, and took his departure, shrugging his shoulders as if to say:

'Where would be the use?'

XXXI

LOST! she was lost—the well-beloved! Neither Augustine's love nor his sacrifice had been the means of saving her soul: 'Why, O God?' he asked, kneeling before the Christ with the outstretched arms. 'Is she so corrupt or so unfortunate that Thou wilt for ever refuse her Thy grace? Have I not prayed for her, suffered for her, expiated her sins for her? Her faults can be no greater than my repentance and Thy mercy.' The voice of the Fathers and Teachers replied: 'God makes no bargains with His creatures; He does not sell His grace, even in return for tears and blood. How canst thou speak of expiation, who still dost cherish thy sin by cherishing thine accomplice in that sin? Unhappy man! thy jealous God must be loved for love of Himself, and not for love of a perishable mortal. Who can fathom His designs? Who shall dare ask of Him a reward for innocence or repentance? Didst thou first of all give Him anything, that thou shouldst presume to ask of Him a recompense? Adore His mysterious judgments, His justice which is not as man's justice, and leave the conduct of souls in His hands, without asking to know the why and the wherefore of His dealings! For thou canst not vaunt the sham merit of thy repentance. God, who knows the thoughts and the

hearts of men, perceives the root and principle of all thine acts ; He knows their motives and their objects ; He knows whether they were born of charity or of greed, and whether they had their origin in divine love or in selfishness.'

Augustine heard these voices, and the austerity, the pious exercises, and the harsh discipline to which he had subjected himself seemed to him a useless mockery. He thought he had isolated himself in penitence, broken all connection with the world, and put a gulf between himself and Temptation. But he had left a thread hung across that gulf, and by its means Temptation had reached him. God now broke this last link ; God demanded an entire sacrifice, and true repentance was now to begin with true solitude.

'Farewell, Fanny ! Farewell, adored phantom ! I was not worthy to save you. May God's will, and not mine, be done !' he murmured with tears.

His lips uttered words of resignation, but doubt and despair were in his heart.

And autumn came once more : the viburnum turned red on the House of the Poppy ; the purple colchicum, interspersed with mushrooms, dotted the humid meadows ; the gold-tinted country exhaled the odour of ripe apples, and the chilly breezes and keen perfumes of October seemed to Augustine to breathe of his past love.

At that time everything was hateful to him, both people and things. He disappeared for whole days, setting forth at dawn, and returning at twilight with fragments of dead leaves in his hair. He was

utterly changed from his former self, so thin, so pale, haunted by a fixed idea, always restless, unable to remain long in one place—like the enchanted men of the fairy tales, driven by a werewolf to their death. Woodcutters sometimes saw him in the depth of the forest, sitting motionless under a tree, with his face buried in his hands. At night Madame Angélique could hear him talking to himself, uttering prayers and threats in which the name of Fanny mingled. He called on her, he implored her, and she was no longer the mocking phantom, but the woman, the ardent lover, whose remembrance kindled his desire. And she came to him only to disappoint that desire, to inflame his jealousy, sometimes pale and weeping, sometimes half nude and fresh from Barral's kisses. He met her everywhere—in the brown and leafless woods, under the elms of the Grove, in the church, in the graveyard. She watched for his awakening from sleep; she followed him to the garden; she turned the pages of his books; she made the pen fall from his fingers; she whispered in his ear as he prayed; she lay in his bed.

Madame Angélique feared danger; she was afraid the temptress was again beginning to exercise her sway, and she tried to gain Augustine's confidence. But the saint knew not the words with which to draw a son to his mother's arms, and the young man eluded all her attempts.

XXXII

TOWARDS the end of this year Jacquine attained her eightieth birthday. She had become very thin, with stringy cheeks and a mouth almost hidden by the prominence of nose and chin. The pupils of her eyes were dim and sunken under the arch of her grey eyebrows. And when she sat hunched up in her doorway she looked just like an ancient owl who fears the cold and has huddled himself into a ball at the edge of his hole.

One evening Mademoiselle Desfossés came and told her what all Hautfort knew already: that Monsieur de Chanteprie was very ill, as a consequence of neglected influenza which had now become complicated by pleurisy. In his delirium he was calling for Jacquine, and seemed surprised that she was not beside him.

Jacquine took her shawl and bonnet, confided her pets to a neighbour's care, locked her door, and followed the housekeeper.

In Augustine's room Captain Courdimanche and Madame Angélique were talking in whispers. The invalid was asleep. A lamp, standing at a distance from the bed, left the pillows in shadow.

'So it's you, Jacquine!' said the mother. 'Ah! I was quite sure you would come—in spite of everything.'

‘I have come for Augustine’s sake and not yours, Madame Angélique; and I’m not going to leave him till he is dead or well.’

She approached the bed and looked at the countenance of him who lay there. She saw the hollow cheeks, the grey and faded skin, the pinched nostrils. So this spectre was the boy she had loved so well! Grief, remorse, ascetic practices, a systematic violation of Nature, had ruined the poor boy and now illness—perhaps indeed hoped-for—was about to complete its destruction.

‘My poor boy!’ said Jacquine. ‘He’s very ill.’

The captain wiped his eyes and sighed, but said nothing. Madame de Chanteprie murmured:

‘There is hope yet. The doctors think he will rally—for a time. But I have offered up my sacrifice; I have committed my son to God’s care. He endures his sufferings with exemplary patience; his soul triumphs over his body as if it were an enemy conquered and thrown to the ground. Yesterday he received extreme unction; and you, Monsieur Courdimanche, know the sentiments of holy joy and resignation with which he welcomed it. You were as much edified and consoled as I.’

‘Edified—yes; but nothing can console me yet!’ said the old man, who made no effort to conceal his emotion.

‘He’s not going to die like that!’ muttered Jacquine. ‘What do the doctors know about the doctors indeed! A man has plenty of life and strength at twenty-six. He’s waking up!’

She took the emaciated hand which lay out from under the sheets, and, leaning over the young man, said

'My darling boy, my treasure, my master, your Jacquine is here—your old Jacquine, and she's going to take care of you herself just as she did when you were a little boy. Don't talk, dear. You others can go away and leave us. I'm quite able to watch over him and wait on him by myself. He has confidence in me.'

So Madame de Chanteprie and Jacquine found themselves together again, through long and weary weeks, at Augustine's bedside. When the invalid felt a little better he listened to short readings from the *Imitation*, and joined at heart in the audible prayers put up by Madame Angélique. But when he was burning with fever and gasping for breath, his first look was for Jacquine.

From her he accepted all the care which his condition demanded, and all the familiar little scoldings which long intimacy justified: she alone knew how to arrange his pillows, smooth out his sheets, and mix the cooling drinks which did him more good than the doctors' drugs. She was a strange mixture of fairy and witch, she was both harsh and motherly, she was as soothing as the 'good herbs' whose perfume clung to her; she did not seem old, but simply very ancient, like the rocks and the woods. Seated at Augustine's bedside, she brooded over him with her magnetic look; she spoke of the approaching spring, of the crops which were forcing their way up through the furrows, of a peach-tree which, by a miracle, had burst into bloom. And her eyes, her gesture, her voice, all said: 'You must live!' Augustine yielded to her charm. Weak

and confiding as a child, he abandoned himself entirely to Jacquine's care, and leaned on her as on the heart of Nature herself.

And, against all hope, his strength returned. On the first Sunday in Lent he was able to get up, and Abbé Le Tourneur said a thanksgiving mass.

The good Courdimanches thanked God with hearts full of joy, but Madame de Chanteprie was not at ease.

'In truth,' she said to Mademoiselle Cariste, 'I am of the opinion of Angélique Arnauld: "His affection leads us to rejoice in the recovery of a child we cherish, but our joy has in it more of love than of wisdom." With pious envy I saw my son arrive in the safe harbour of salvation, soon to be freed from all bodily misery, his eternal happiness assured. Now he is cast once more on the stormy sea, amidst the rocks of sin, exposed to every danger of shipwreck. I am almost inclined to pity this poor child.'

Mademoiselle Cariste started.

'My good friend, what do you mean? Do you regret that your son is not dead?'

'Don't be horrified,' said Madame Angélique. 'As a mother, I rejoice at Augustine's recovery; as a Christian, I hope I may never have to feel sorrow for that recovery. If God had so willed, my son might now be in glory; he would be praying for me and awaiting me there. And I could die in peace.'

Mademoiselle Courdimanche certainly respected the Saint, but she could not help stammering out words about maternal love—that sacred instinct.

'There is no such thing as a "sacred instinct".'

retorted Madame de Chanteprie. 'We have our instincts in common with the animals, and Saint Elizabeth asked God to destroy the maternal instinct in her and give her grace "to no longer love her children after the flesh." Was she an unnatural mother?'

'Since the Church canonised her, I must not blame Saint Elizabeth, but——'

'I love my son,' continued Madame Angélique; 'I have spent my life in praying for him; and because I love him, Mademoiselle Cariste, his salvation is more precious to me than his happiness, his health, his life——'

The old maid could not reply. She did not feel sure that the God of Madame de Chanteprie was the same God whom she, Cariste Courdimanche, worshipped. 'No!' she thought, 'I cannot recognise our Lord in that terrible God who saves only the small number of the elect. Our Lord does not demand human sacrifices; He has compassion on the frailties of His creatures, and His wrath may be averted with prayers, alms, and sincere sorrow for sin.'

The smile of the Child Jesus, the lilies of St. Joseph, the open hands of the white Virgin, all of them ornaments of her little drawing-room, brought comfort to Mademoiselle Cariste's heart. She felt how pleasant it was to live in moderate piety, only half-way to saintliness, and she resolved not to force her childlike soul to climb those mystic summits where dwelt the soul of Madame de Chanteprie.

Augustine's convalescence, which had been greeted as a miracle, proceeded but tardily, and he was often

threatened with relapse. The young man, deceived by his apparent recovery, declared he felt very well and meant to resume his old ways of life as far as possible. What those ways were, Monsieur Courdimanche, who had with his own hands taken the haircloth from the sick man's bleeding back, knew well enough. The captain called on Abbé Le Tourneur himself to intervene, and the latter had absolved Monsieur de Chanteprie from his fasts and penances, and imposed on him obedience to his doctors as a duty. Jacqueline still testified to him, for at the outset of her rule she had declared she would not leave her boy.

‘The spring will complete my cure,’ said Augustine.

The spring came; the pear-trees blossomed, and their green mantle overspread the Grove, and Monsieur de Chanteprie began to go as far as the garden when the sun was warm enough. Supported by Jacqueline and Madame Angélique, he walked to the end of the terrace; and these walks were sad indeed. Mother, son, and servant noted one another's thoughts as expressed by their faces, and yet said not a word.

Augustine grew quickly tired. Out of breath by his feeble limbs giving way under him, he returned up to his gloomy room after the walk was over. Jacqueline wheeled his armchair to the window, and taking up her knitting, sat down opposite him. The silence made the hours seem long. Soon Monsieur de Chanteprie let fall the book which was too heavy for his frail hands. He drew aside the marble curtain, and looked at the prospect which lay before him—Old Hautfort, the church steeple, the Gothic gateway, the brown roofs, and the little church

on which his gaze rested longest and last of all. What counsel did he receive, what mysterious appeal was it that came to him from the dead who lay sleeping there? At twilight the room turned uniformly grey. Augustine stirred no longer. A trancelike rigidity fell on his shadowed face, his lowered eyelids, and his half-open mouth. Frightened at seeing him so pale, Jacquine touched his hand to waken him. Then a shudder went through him; his cheeks grew flushed. Each night he went to bed weaker and more feverish than the night before.

'Ah! my boy,' said Jacquine one day, 'what are you looking at down there? Don't stare so at the cemetery. It's not a pleasant sight, and if I were you I'd go back to the pretty old room, the Poppy room!'

He smiled sadly. Kneeling beside him, she begged:

'My boy, my dear boy, do help us! Of what use are medicines, and doctors, and your old Jacquine's nursing, if you have lost all taste for life? You would get well, if you only wanted to! My boy, is there nothing in the world you want or regret? Is there nothing you love, no one you want to see again?'

'Nothing, no one, Jacquine. Don't worry me, there's a good old nurse. I am at rest at last.'

She whispered in the young man's ear:

'You're not deceiving me? Would you like me to go—to Paris—to find out?'

He put his hand over her mouth. She yielded to his unexpressed wish, and said no more, though

his indifference seemed to her to augur ill. Augustine was not consoled: he was simply hausted in mind and body, and the little strength his illness had left him was consumed, not in suffering, nor in expiating his sins, but in just living or rather existing, a little longer. What she called his Christian resignation was the first approach of death numbing his mind and senses. Jacquine's instinct had discovered a truth which his mother and his friends did not realise: Monsieur de Chanteprie would not get well because he did not want to; he was dying because he had lost all desire to live.

So Jacquine was in despair. She, the natural healer, to whom 'poisonous plants' and 'magic herbs' had all given up their secrets, she who by means of her philtres and prescriptions assuaged the sufferings of the incurable and revived the dying, felt herself worsted. She confided her trouble and her fears to Monsieur Courdimanche. He sent for the doctor, questioned him, and received in return a declaration of inability to do more. Son of a consumptive and a neurotic, offspring of a family whose strength had been exhausted by sanguineous marriages, Monsieur de Chanteprie might no doubt have lived if he had made up his mind to live like other people. But he had sacrificed everything, including himself, to his religious fervour; he had committed slow suicide.

'Then nothing can be done?' said Monsieur Courdimanche, overwhelmed with grief.

'Nothing—except to let the unhappy man die peacefully, and perhaps prolong his life a little. I have told Madame de Chanteprie: I told

that if her son had not tried to be a saint like herself he would not now be at death's door. She replied that the welfare of the soul was of far more consequence than that of the vile body. Our conversation stopped at that point, and I am not inclined to resume it. I have a horror of Madame de Chanteprie. Besides, one cannot argue with fanatics. One can only leave them to their notions, since it is impossible to convince them that they are in the wrong.'

Monsieur Courdimanche dared not defend Madame Angélique. He went into the church, to weep. The poor man, who was no fanatic, and yet very little removed from a saint, could not make up his mind to look on humanity as a vast gathering of vile creatures. He loved Augustine, and now that God was calling him to a premature enjoyment of the bliss of heaven, Monsieur Courdimanche said timidly: 'Lord, not yet!' He had even begged his Master to take him, a useless old man, in Augustine's stead. But the Lord would not grant his petition.

At this time Augustine no longer went out, he scarcely spoke, and only Monsieur Forgerus' letters could arouse his attention at all. Nothing gave him either pleasure or pain. Half free and half captive, his soul wandered already in unknown regions, on the borders of life and death; he was no longer of this world.

Soon a mysterious hand touched the fair hair, and turned it dull and lustreless; the eyes, whose violet-blue grew faded; the nails, which became curved like claws; the body, which was exhausted by fever and sweats; and the withered skin,

through which the lines of the skull could be plainly seen. Augustine did not struggle. He gently slipped from Jacqueline's arms: he seemed to fade away and dissolve into an unearthly shadow. He was disappearing from the world like a figure sketched in charcoal, which slowly vanishes from the paper till nothing but a white page remains.

'He will last till the end of May,' said the doctor.

June commenced; Augustine 'lasted' still, but his strength was rapidly declining. He left his room no more.

Father Le Tourneur often came to see him, and brought him books of religious consolation—'good books,' approved by the bishops. Augustine had hardly the strength to turn over the leaves of these devotional treatises, which were as insipid as the cooling drinks they gave him. And besides, he had lost his former liking for the sweet symbolism of the gospels and the gentle mysticism of the *Imitation*. He preferred those harsher, more sombre, books of the Bible which discourse of man's nothingness and the vanity of all things. He who had found in the love of one woman a happiness denied to Solomon in his harems, he who now lay abandoned on the dunghill of his hopes and joys, echoed the lamentations of Ecclesiastes and the sighing of Job. He rejoiced in his misery. He rejoiced in despising himself, and, with himself, all that he had desired, all that he had loved. His conviction of the vanity of all things hardened his heart so strangely, that in looking back on the past—he was amazed that he had loved Fanny. How useless and absurd the enthusiasms of youth

and of love seemed to him now! What was the good of loving? What was the good of enjoying, suffering, possessing, knowing? Why exhaust oneself in barren emotions while on the way to the grave? And at night, when his diseased imagination took a fearful delight in dwelling on the images of death and dissolution, he would stretch himself out between the sheets, with his arms pressed stiffly to his sides, trying to realise the attitude of death, which would so soon be his for ever. In the daytime, looking out of the window, and listening to the voices of the dead who were calling him to their midst, he lost himself in thoughts of mortality and the grave, thoughts which Jacquine no longer dared disturb by word or sigh.

One evening Mademoiselle Desfossés knocked gently at the door of the room.

‘Jacquine, a lady is asking to see you. Will you come down?’

Jacquine, taken by surprise, folded up her knitting.

‘A lady? But I’m not expecting any one—I don’t know——’

Monsieur de Chanteprie was unmoved.

‘Go!’ he said. ‘What are you afraid of?’

She looked at him fixedly; he repeated:

‘Go down at once, since you are wanted.’

And he resumed his meditative attitude, his brow against the window-pane.

Jacquine, with her thoughts in a whirl, went away.

When she returned Augustine had not stirred.

‘It’s my niece,’ she said, ‘my niece Georgette. She wants to give you some fruit from her garden, and she would be so pleased if you could see her.’

‘Where is she?’

‘Outside—in the passage.’

He said in a weary voice:

‘Well, let her come in!’

She entered, and her muslin blouse, her smile, her look, her tawny hair, seemed to light up the room from the moment she appeared on its threshold. With timid blushes, her rounded arm supporting a basket on her hip, she looked compassionately at Monsieur de Chanteprie.

And he, turning his eyes at last from the landscape which held such a fascination for him, and raising himself on his cushions, seemed suddenly to wake up. He recognised this dazzlingly fair girl. He had not forgotten the idyll in the orchard, the greenish reflection of the trees on the white bosom and bent neck, and the movement of the fingers as they plucked the ripe currants from their stalks. It was Georgette—the first temptation, the first vision of the eternal Eve! Sometimes Augustine had in his reveries been involuntarily reminded of that hair, that bosom, and those glowing, rosy cheeks. And Georgette too had not forgotten the youth of the cold eyes and short speech, who had picked her up on the road one June evening. What vague sentiment was it that brought her—a vision of radiant youth, with hair full of light and hands full of fruit—to the side of the dying man?

‘Come over here,’ said Augustine, ‘and put your basket down on the table. Are those cherries from your garden?’

‘Yes; and the strawberries are from the woods. I found them when I was looking for mushrooms near Rouvrenoir. They are quite fresh. They smell so sweet!’

'Near Rouvrenoir? Yes; it's the season for strawberries. And the rain we have just had will have made all the fungi spring up in the woods. The woods! How nice it is in the woods! I was so fond of that wide avenue of beeches which dips down into a glade. Try in this direction, Mademoiselle Georgette; Rouvrenoir is not the only spot where the strawberries grow.'

'I'll certainly do so, sir, and I'll bring you more strawberries—strawberries which have ripened under the beeches you love so well.'

He remained for a few moments absorbed in thought, as if intoxicated by the odour of the fruit. Jacqueline took his hand.

'My boy, don't tire yourself by talking. Georgette shall come again if you like. Come, my child, you must go now. You are tiring Monsieur de Chanteprie.'

'Let me thank her first. Are you still in service, Mademoiselle Georgette?'

'No, sir; I have gone home to my parents—because I am going to be married.'

She blushed a rosy red.

'Then I hope you will be happy. Good-bye, mademoiselle.'

'Good morning, sir; I hope you'll soon be well.'

She curtsied awkwardly and yet prettily, and departed, hurried off by Jacqueline. The young man closed his eyes.

His soul, which had so long dwelt in company with the dead, seemed at this moment to be engaged in a feeble struggle for liberty. Turning his attention from the tombs, Augustine looked once more at life. And, encircled by a dawnlike mist, he

seemed to see rising before him dim shadows—symbols of his youthful fancies and his youthful loves. Gradually three forms took shape, and became clear to his eyes—forms with floating gowns and women's faces. The first, a vague phantom, wore a wreath of poppies; the second was crowned with clusters of ripe currants; and the third held out her white arms to him with a gesture at once sorrowful and voluptuous. The phantom figure was no less real than the living ones. And the living were as far removed as the phantom. Rosalba, Georgette, Fanny! They had entered one after another into Augustine's life; they had led him on from ignorance to knowledge, from knowledge to desire, and from desire to passion. He saw them as contemporaries of one another, in spite of the lapse of years; as united despite the gulf which separated them; they mingled in his memory as the single, yet threefold, image of Love.

And his soul suddenly went forth to them in blind desire. His heart threw off the obsession of the grave and rose in desperate revolt against the powers of death. He was no longer a Christian, a stoic, resigned to his fate. He wanted to live! His whole being was stricken with a panic terror, such as unnerves defeated forces on the field of battle. He opened his eyes: the sight of his room made him shudder. He tried to walk: the ground gave way beneath his feet. He clutched at the walls, and they slipped from his grasp. He cried:

'Jacquine! quick! Take me away! I want to get out of this place! I'm stifling!'

But his haggard eyes grew suddenly dim. He fainted.

XXXIII

It was Midsummer Eve. The weather had been stormy, and a lead-coloured sky obscured the distant horizon. There was not a breath of wind. The deep-blue shadows of great clouds lay motionless on the hills.

The bed had been drawn into the middle of the room. Madame Angélique and Mademoiselle Courdimanche were arranging on the table a white cloth, a few candles, and a vase of roses and mignonette. On the floor were scattered flower-petals and twigs of fennel, whose aroma recalled the rustic splendour of Corpus Christi processions. Jacqueline, seated on a low stool, with her elbows on her knees and her face in her hands, was watching the preparations with an indifferent eye.

For the last four days Augustine had maintained an unbroken silence, would see no one, and seemed to have withdrawn himself entirely from the outside world, like those animals which seek a lonely spot in which to die. That morning alone had he uttered a word; he had expressed a wish to receive the viaticum, and they were now expecting the Abbé Le Tourneur.

Without could he heard the silvery tinkling of a little bell, gradually drawing nearer and nearer. Mademoiselle Cariste opened the window. She

saw the Abbé Le Tourneur, accompanied by the altar-boy, passing under the Bordier Gate. Captain Courdimanche, bareheaded, walked beside the consecrated host, and the women standing in their doorways made the sign of the Cross as 'the good God' went by.

With tear-dimmed eyes Mademoiselle Cariste left the window. She lighted the candles, and, dipping a branch of boxwood in holy water, sprinkled the floor of the room and the sheets of the bed. At last the door opened, and Mademoiselle Desfossés announced :

'The host is here.'

Immediately the women, Jacquine herself included, went down on their knees.

A murmur of prayers filled the long passage, and the altar-boy came in sight, wearing a crimson robe, and carrying the little silver bell in his left hand, and in his right a lighted candle. Father Le Tourneur followed, bearing aloft the sacred host, which he placed reverentially between the candles on the table. Then all the onlookers left the room.

The priest came and sat at Augustine's bedside, and gently invited him to begin his confession. Monsieur de Chanteprie, propped up by pillows, spoke in a low tone. He pleaded guilty to want of fervour and whole-heartedness when at his prayers; and to ill-suppressed impatience, and feelings almost of anger and dislike towards those who waited on him.

He suddenly stopped, and Father Le Tourneur, thinking he had finished his confession, began the little speech he had long ago composed and learned

by heart, for use on such occasions as this: 'Resignation—trust in the infinite goodness of God—association of one's own sufferings with those of Christ crucified.' Father Le Tourneur's emotion was indeed so keen and real as to make itself felt in his accent, but he could not express himself in any but the conventional formulas. The priest's hands were trembling; he avoided looking at the penitent: and yet the tepid stream of his eloquence flowed on as if from an inexhaustible spring—smoothly, calmly, uninterruptedly, free from all ebullitions.

'And you must submit yourself, body and soul, to the divine will, must you not, my dear son? I will now——'

Augustine sighed. Fearing that all was not well with him, the priest turned his head:

'What is the matter? Are you in pain?'

The young man's lips were half parted. He could not speak. But his drawn mouth and haggard eyes expressed such fearful suffering that the Abbé Le Tourneur was alarmed.

'Tell me what is wrong. What are you afraid of?'

'I dare not—I cannot——'

'There is some sin you dare not confess?'

'I dare not communicate,' said Augustine. 'I dare not take the holy sacrament I asked for. Oh! no! no! I dare not——'

'Why not?'

'I am afraid——'

'What are you afraid of?—of death? But your condition—serious as it is—is not hopeless. The extreme unction you received when you were first ill did wonders for you. Once already has

God brought you back from the gates of death. Perhaps——'

Monsieur de Chanteprie shook his head.

'Well,' said the priest, 'even if God were to take you to Himself, you surely would not lack faith and courage—you, a Chanteprie, a Christian!'

The young man's face wore an agonised expression:

'I am afraid,' he repeated—and his voice was but a whisper—'I am afraid—of God!'

'But that is very foolish of you,' said the Abbé Le Tourneur, completely taken aback. 'You are afraid of God? You dare not receive the pledge of our redemption—the sacred host?'

'I am not worthy——'

'Not one of us is worthy to become the tabernacle of the living God. But although we are but corrupt in ourselves, let us not forget that Jesus bestows on us His merits, and washes away our sins in His divine blood. You have sinned, my son; but your sincere repentance, your faith which the world could not shake——'

Augustine shuddered.

'My sincere repentance! My faith! Alas!'

'What do you mean? Have you harboured guilty regrets or sinful doubts?'

'Yes—doubts.'

'How long?'

'For the last few days—since I got worse.' Oh! how can I describe my involuntary thoughts, the sudden defection of my will? How can I express the agony of mind which is the forerunner of bodily agony? My God! you know I was devoid of pride, had no regrets, scarcely even a memory. The wound

made by love bled no longer. I thought I was resigned and indifferent. I relinquished myself to approaching death. Yes, I was departing this life in peace and trust——'

'And now?'

'God!' cried Augustine. 'O God! is it possible? For a fraction of my life I dwelt in the world. Can I, unknown to myself, have brought away with me from the world the germ of that doubt which now grows on me from day to day? Alas! I seek refuge at the feet of Christ crucified; I recite the Apostles' Creed; I endeavour to rekindle my faith by the light of Holy Writ. Alas! alas! In the night of approaching death its feeble flame flickers and is no more.'

'Do not dwell on such thoughts, my son. The devil is tempting you. Do not listen to him. Do not argue with him; do not argue even with yourself. You take the vain delusions of your fever for realities. I implore you, be calm; have faith: pray.'

'Tell me,' said Augustine, in a voice of entreaty, 'surely I cannot lose faith *now*; I shall not be bereft of the faith which has ruled my whole life, and to which I have sacrificed everything? It would be a fearful mockery. God could not permit it. And yet! Right down in the depths of my being I hear something—some one—protesting: "Supposing you have been deceived? Proof? certainty? There is none which human reason can grasp. To believe, you must love, and in this dread hour of death you do not love God enough to believe in Him." In such wise does that terrible

voice speak. And so, losing my footing, becoming swamped on every side, I cling to reason as to a rotten plank which may perhaps save me in this hideous shipwreck of the soul. I recall Pascal's saying: "If I lose, I lose nothing. If I win, I win everything." But that mocking voice sneers in my ear: "If you lose, do you lose nothing? The 'nothing' you talk of so glibly is your youth, your strength, your health, your love! Your 'nothing' is your whole life, which, humanly speaking, might have been useful and happy! The laws of another world, divine judgment, eternal rewards and punishments—what are they but vain hypotheses? There is nothing real or certain for you beyond that life which you have thrown away like a worthless stake!" Thus speaks the voice again. And I, a prey to the utmost misery——'

'Temptations!' cried Father Le Tourneur, stretching forth his hand as if in exorcism: 'vain and despicable temptations! They are but the last attacks of the spirit of evil!'

Augustine rose on his bed. His emaciated hands seized the priest's arm, and his haggard face was terrible to see.

'Help me!' he cried. 'Help me! Save me! The enemy is there. He is lying in wait for me. He lurks in the eyes of women, in the books of the learned, in the inner sanctuary of my heart. There—there—at my bedside—all through my nights of suffering—with Jacqueline's face—with Fanny's face. It is he, Father, it is he who whispers in my ear those fearful doubts—that blasphemous fear of the holy sacrament. Oh! pray with me for his de-

parture! pray that I may die in peace! But I don't want to die yet! My soul is not prepared. I have not expiated my sins. I want to live and suffer. Oh! don't leave me! Protect me from Satan! I implore God to grant me a respite!—just a few days! How can I appear before an incensed Judge? What could I urge in self-defence? I should be cast into depths of unspeakable torment if I entered His terrible presence still burdened with crime as I am! Eternal damnation would be my lot! What a fearful thing to be deprived of grace! What a hideous eternity!

He started up suddenly in bed, as if to flee from a terrible vision, then fell back on his pillow. His chest heaved with sobs; tears rose to his eyes, and slowly traversed the furrows which sorrow and suffering had worn in his cheeks.

The Abbé Le Tourneur forgot all his carefully prepared phrases. He had baptized Augustine de Chanteprie; he had prepared him for his first communion; he had administered to him extreme unction, and doubtless he would very soon be saying a last Requiem over his grave. He thought he knew through and through this young man whose counsellor he had been in all the phases of his religious life, and he had always reckoned on Augustine making an edifying end, a triumphant death which would be the talk of the parish for many days. So his despairing outburst grieved Father Le Tourneur both as friend and as priest. He had not foreseen such a catastrophe. He knew not whether to seek inspiration in human friendship or in theological dogmas, or whether affectionate

words would console Augustine better than arguments. He came to the conclusion that now was not the time for disputation, and that he must endeavour to instil hope into the poor soul driven desperate by the doubts to which human reason had given birth. So he encouraged Augustine to hope, mingling his exhortations with extempore prayer; he assured him that temptation, if unsought by the penitent and patiently borne, can but add to spiritual merit; that the greatest saints have experienced the pangs of doubt; and that our Lord Himself had begged the Father to take away the cup. Yes, the world had looked on aghast while the Son cried to the Father: 'Why hast Thou forsaken me?' And as the priest spoke he felt the thin fingers relax their grasp on his arm; the despairing eyes, whose gaze was fixed on his, seemed to cry again: 'Help me!' Augustine's last tears, the bitterest he had ever shed, coursed each other slowly and heavily down his cheeks.

Having finished his confession, Monsieur de Chanteprie stumbled through the formula of contrition, and the priest raised his hands to bless and absolve him. Then he exhorted him to spend his time in pious meditation, and to yield himself into God's hands, as a guilty child who has been forgiven by his father. 'You will now receive the holy sacrament.' Augustine shuddered. 'Receive it in all confidence, and with a humble, trusting heart.' And the door was opened again. Augustine saw a black line of silent figures enter the room one by one, and kneel around the bed: he dimly perceived the glimmer of the candles, which looked yellow in

the broad daylight, the altar-boy's red robe, the white surplice of the priest, and the silver-gilt sheen of the sacred pyx. The perfume of roses filled the room, and it seemed to Monsieur de Chanteprie that his soul was already detached from his body, and floating amid the dim lights and faint odours which surrounded him. Half conscious, and filled with a gentle melancholy, he felt the approach of his God; he felt around him the Church, represented by the priest and the assemblage of the faithful: the Church ready to shelter him under its symbolic stole, to cleanse him with its purifying waters, and to soothe him with its millenary chants, which have hushed in the hour of death generations of men, one after the other.

The Abbé Le Tourneur had gone. The room was now bathed in the mellow light of sunset, and the persistent and funereal odour of the extinguished candles mingled with that of the roses. The corners of the room were already in obscurity; but the muslin curtains reflected the waning day, and Monsieur de Chanteprie watched the light—that sweet evening light which he would never see again—fade gradually away.

A strange silence had fallen on his spirit. He thought dreamily of long-past events which he thought he had forgotten—trifling circumstances of his childhood, people who had been dead for years, but whose faces now rose up before him quite clearly. They were dead, just as he would soon be dead. Of him there would remain no more than remained of them—a little heap of bones crumbling

into dust day by day, and a vague image in the memory of those who had known him, growing fainter and fainter as time went on. And his friends who had loved him would die too in a few years' time, so that soon his name would never more be mentioned; no one would recall his earthly form, and then indeed total annihilation would be his lot.

Augustine moved his head, and felt the silky hair ruffling his temples; he opened and shut his eyes, and found they obeyed the orders given them by his nerves; he pressed his hands together, and moved his fingers. Yes! he lived; he was very weak indeed, but he lived! And yet in a few hours perhaps, *he* would be no longer, he would be that thing they call a *corpse*. And in a week, a fortnight, what would he be, what would have become of his eyelids, his lips, his hands? His hands! He raised them to the light, and looked at them attentively, with a feeling akin to pity.

'When I exist no more! I cannot realise a time when I shall exist no more. Neither can I realise that the dead still exist in some nameless, undefined place. My father—the old keeper at the "Three Limes"—Faron the drunkard—little Mélie, the farrier's daughter: we, the living (do I still belong to the living?), we mourn our dead because their disembodied souls are just as little known to us as their inanimate corpses. To all sight and seeming, the dead are dead indeed.'

He shuddered.

'I am talking just like Jacquine! Why do I not experience the thoughts and feelings proper to a

Christian who has just received the holy sacrament? Nature is fighting against grace, even at the last moment.'

He forced himself to pray and to think of eternity. But the Christian conception of death, which had been so painfully present to his mind at confession, gradually faded away. The human conception of death dominated him, and a purely physical fear took the place of his spiritual terrors.

'Satan is tempting me,' thought Augustine. 'I must meditate and pray. I must, I will pray!'

He mechanically recited a prayer, but his eyes were fixed on the window, absorbedly watching the growing dusk. A last oblique ray of daylight rested on the right side of the embrasure, and gradually—oh, so gradually!—left the white wall in darkness. An hour went by. Jacquine entered with a lamp, and Augustine said impatiently:

'No! No! Take it away!'

'But it is quite dark, my dear boy!'

He murmured:

'Yes; the night begins.'

And, as if his strength had departed with the day, he stretched himself out, with his head thrown back, and his arms resting listlessly at his sides. A melancholy, bitter as death itself, filled his soul, and he stirred no more till dead of night.

The Courdimanches had left, promising to return in the evening; Madame de Chanteprie and Jacquine, seated side by side in a corner of the room, were watching for the least movement on Augustine's part.

'He is asleep. He must be better!' whispered Madame Angélique. 'Look—even the body is benefited by the vivifying grace of the holy sacrament.'

Jacquine took the lamp and drew near the bed; then she returned and sat down again by her mistress's side.

'Hush!' she said. 'We mustn't talk. He might hear us. His eyes are wide open. You would almost think he was crying. And when I spoke to him, he just turned his head on the pillow and didn't answer.'

'He is talking with God, Jacquine. Yes, of course; do not let us disturb him.'

The lamp-shade, covered with blue gauze, shed a ghostly light. In the semi-darkness the narrow bed looked white as a tomb. The atmosphere was heavy with the odour of roses and wax candles, mingled with the aroma of drugs. Augustine complained of want of air.

'If I open the window you'll take cold, my dear boy!' said Jacquine.

'Oh! what does that matter?'

She touched him; his skin was damp and cold and his pulse very feeble. Since the afternoon his face had changed, it had grown old in the space of a few hours; his eyes were leaden, and approaching death had written itself on all his features.

'Are you thirsty? Would you like me to raise your pillows?'

'Oh, let me alone!'

He showed already the indifference of the dying—indifference towards all persons and things, manifesting itself in churlishness even to those who

waited on him. Jacquine, who had seen many people die, both old and young, knew this symptom of approaching dissolution, and with a sad shake of the head made Madame de Chanteprie understand that the end was near.

Dumb and grief-stricken, they resumed their watch. Madame Angélique prayed fervently—so fervently indeed that her sorrow was almost forgotten in the ardour of her prayers. She was thinking with holy joy of the not far distant day when she would join her beloved son in Paradise. Already she saw the crown of glory on his brow, and looked at him with awe. And she thanked God who had permitted her to bring him forth to life eternal as well as to an earthly existence. She did not for a moment doubt that she had done her duty as a mother and a Christian without a single dereliction. And at her side, crouching in the shadow, Jacquine was weeping. She was thinking of her boy's childhood, of his pretty fair hair, his gentle manners, and how fond he had been of her; and her poor old heart broke in silence. Augustine! She had loved him so well! He had been to her what a husband or a lover is to other women: her pride, her delight, her torment, her love! Yes, the only love of her long life: indeed, her life itself. They might just as well bury her with her boy, wrapped in the same shroud: she knew his death would be hers.

The heat of the day had kindled the fires of night. Silent flashes of lightning illumined the starless sky and phosphorescent horizon. Moths flew in at the window and buzzed in the sickroom.

Jacquine, who believed in portents, was filled with horror at seeing them fluttering round the lamp, their grey velvety wings marked with the ominous death's head. Suddenly gay voices were heard in the distance. Bonfires shot into flame on all the surrounding hills.

'They are dancing,' thought Jacquine. 'It's Midsummer Eve. Down there the boys and girls are dancing round the bonfires, and later on they'll be kissing each other in any out-of-the-way spot they can find. *They* don't want to be saints. Love is quite enough for them.'

Augustine stirred. The two women hastened to his side.

'What is it?' they asked him.

'I'm very ill! Don't leave me any more! Mother! Jacquine!'

'He's going!' cried Jacquine. 'The lamp! Hold the lamp! Give me the vinegar. Oh, my boy—my dear boy!'

The Courdimanches, who were coming up the stairs at the moment, heard Jacquine's cry. They hastened into the room, and mingled their tears with those of the watchers; but the sick man opened his eyes and looked wonderingly at the mourners.

The lamp, which had been moved to his bedside, shed its light on his face. He was pale with a pallor which looked almost green against the dead white of the pillows; his lips were purple, his eyes hollow, and the large, heavy pupils already reflected the horror of the eternal night on which he was entering. His groping hands picked at the sheets,

and gathered them over himself like a shroud. Drops of cold sweat fell from his forehead.

He was bereft of speech. His eyes were all of him that lived. They burned with dull animosity, and their wandering gaze travelled from Madame Angélique to the Courdimanches, and from the Courdimanches to those absent ones whom yet he saw, and those eyes seemed to say :

‘See what you have done with me!’

‘He is asking our prayers,’ said Madame de Chanteprie.

The dying man’s glance fell on her. But neither she nor any one could understand the meaning of that glance. His eyes roved again, and this time rested on Jacqueline, with a look so sad and tender that she broke into sobs.

‘Hush!’ said Madame de Chanteprie. ‘His soul is entering into glory. Let the dead mourn their dead, but let us Christians pray!’

She turned to the crucifix affixed to the wall above the bed, and, holding her son’s hand in her own, began to recite the prayers for the dying. Her high, clear, distinct voice was heard above Jacqueline’s sobs and the death-rattle of the moribund:

‘Go forth from this world, O Christian soul, in the name of the all-powerful God who created thee, in the name of Jesus, Son of the living God, who died for thee, in the name of the Holy Spirit who dwells in thee; in the name of Angels and Archangels, in the name of Thrones and Dominions, in the name of the Cherubim and Seraphim, in the name of the Holy Apostles and Evangelists, in the name of the monks and hermits of old, in the name

of the martyrs and confessors, in the name of the virgins and all the saints of God. Mayest thou be at peace to-day, and thy dwelling in Holy Zion. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.'

The rattling in his throat grew louder. It was a deep, spasmodic, terrible indrawing of the breath, which seemed to go through and through Captain Courdimanche and Mademoiselle Cariste. Madame Angélique prayed on :

'Go forth from this world, O Christian soul. I commend thee to the all-powerful God ; I leave thee in the hands of Him whose creature thou art, so that after thou hast paid the tribute of death thou mayest return to thy Maker who formed thee out of the dust of the earth. May the terrors of hell, with its fires and its tortures, be unknown to thee. May Jesus, who died for thee, deliver thee from eternal death. Mayest thou be received into eternal joy, and dwell in divine bliss in the company of the saints, to all eternity. Amen !'

Jacquine wept no more. Her features, fine in their old age, had become rigid, as if carved in old dark wood. Her mien was grand, majestic, maternal. Her forehead was bound with some black material, and she looked like one of those old nurses who in times of ancient Greece hung over the bodies of slain heroes. Dipping a cloth into water mixed with vinegar she moistened the dying man's dry lips, and now and then, with a tender kiss, wiped the sweat from his brow. Then she would murmur gently :

'Sleep, my darling boy, sleep !'

And Madame Angélique still prayed :

'We commend to Thee, O Lord, the soul of this dying man, and we entreat Thee, O Lord Jesus, Saviour of the world, to enfold in the bosom of the patriarchs this soul for whom Thou didst in mercy come down upon the earth. Receive, O Lord, Thy creature, who was not made by alien gods, but by Thyself alone, the living and true God, than whom no other gods exist. O Lord, bring joy to his soul by Thy presence, and remember not past sins and iniquities, into which he was led by the evil desires of the flesh. For, albeit he sinned, he did not abandon the faith of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost; but he preserved that faith intact; zeal for God was written in his heart, and he faithfully adored the Lord who made all things.'

A grey insect fluttered above the lamp, until presently its little body fell against the glass and was shrivelled up. The petals of the white roses were falling one by one on the cloth of the little altar. Out-of-doors a woman's voice was calling :

'Jeanne! Berthe! Cora! Marie!'

'More vinegar!' said Jacqueline. 'This water is warm. Some fresh water, quick! No! I don't want any one to help me. Leave us alone! I'll help him through his last moments, by myself. He's sinking fast. Yes, yes, go to sleep, I'm here, your old Jacqueline is here! I'll hush you to sleep as I used. Poor boy! poor boy! How sad! He's struggling for breath, he's in pain! And have I grown so old only to see this? I am but an ignorant old woman who could not save her boy! He's dying—dying! and there are people who say there's a God in heaven! So He's deaf when those in

trouble call on Him? All the prayers, the chants, and the tomfoolery of the priests are just waste of time! A God! A God who kills our children! No, no, it can't be! There's no God! There's no justice! They've killed my Augustine with their lies! He's dying for nothing—nothing!

She wrung her hands with a savage cry. The Courdimanches were on their knees, weeping. Madame Angélique, motionless and upright in front of the sombre crucifix, finished the prayers for the dying:

'O Lord, we beseech Thee to forget his ignorance and the sins of his youth; show him Thy great mercy, and remember him in Thy glory. May the heavens be opened unto him, and may the angels rejoice with him! Receive him, O Lord, into Thy Kingdom!'

Augustine's mouth was drawn. His eyes, which saw no longer, and on which the shadow of death was falling, opened for the last time with an expression of supreme anguish. A thin stream of blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. And the poor trembling soul went forth into the Unknown, to the murmur of prayers.

